

Spotlight on Film Festivals in Ukraine Today: Accounts, Responses, Calls to Action

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KEYWORDS

Film Festivals

Ukraine

War

Boycott of Russian Culture

Cultural Diplomacy

Trauma

ABSTRACT

This roundtable begins with each festival organizer explaining how the outbreak of the current war in Ukraine affected the planning and organizing of their respective film festivals. The discussion that unfolds conveys that the festival organizers stand quite united in their responses to the situation, despite differences in geographic proximity to ongoing hostilities on the ground and opportunities available for drafting up alternative scenarios. They engage in cultural diplomacy and collaborate with international colleagues to create visibility for Ukrainian culture and people. Moreover, there is a shared belief in the need for a boycott of Russian culture. The edited transcript presents detailed argumentation in favor of the Russian cultural boycott as well as responses to concrete issues that had media coverage. Other themes discussed concern the role cinema and film festivals can play in the face of war. The participants acknowledge the trauma that is being inflicted on the Ukrainian people and express hope that safety will be restored quickly, for this is a basic condition necessary to start thinking about and giving substance to the role of cinema and film festivals in dealing with the trauma of war.

1. Shumylovych, Bohdan; Makhanets, Oleksandr; Nazaruk, Taras; Otrishchenko, Natalia; Brunow, Dagmar. "Preserving the now! Mediating memories and archiving experiences in Ukraine."

In: *NECSUS_European Journal of Media Studies*. #Materiality, Jg. 11 (2022), Nr. 2, S. 1–19.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/19171>.

Spotlight on Film Festivals in Ukraine Today: Accounts, Responses, Calls to Action

Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck in conversation with Anastasiia Puhach, Yevgenia Kriegsheim, Victoria Leshchenko, Anna Machukh, Olha Reiter, and Bohdan Zhuk

Shortly after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022, the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) organized a roundtable with colleagues of the Lviv Center for Urban History, hosted by the Media and Cultural Memory Workgroup.¹ A few weeks later, we, as chairs of the NECS Film Festival Research Workgroup, also organized a roundtable on Ukraine. "Spotlight on Film Festivals in Ukraine Today! Accounts, Responses, Calls to Action" brought together festival organizers of Ukrainian film festivals from various regions to share their accounts of unfolding events and give insights into the current situation. The second roundtable was hosted and financially supported by NECS and the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF. This is an edited transcript of the online event that took place on April 6, 2022, on Zoom.

At the time, several of the programmers had fled Ukraine. Our collaborator, Anastasiia Puhach, had left Kyiv and relocated to Berlin, where her colleague, Yevgenia Kriegsheim, was already residing and Victoria Leshchenko was also at the time. Olha Reiter called in from Bautzen, near Dresden. Anna Machukh and Bohdan Zhuk were both in Ukraine when the online event took place; Bohdan left Kyiv at the beginning of the full-scale invasion and was in his hometown in western Ukraine.

The roundtable begins with each festival organizer explaining how the outbreak of the war affected the planning and organizing of their respective festivals. From the discussion that unfolds, we learn that the festival organizers stand quite united in their responses to the situation, despite differences in geographic proximity to ongoing hostilities on the ground and opportunities available for drafting up alternative scenarios. They engage in cultural diplomacy and collaborate with international colleagues to create visibility for Ukrainian culture and people. Moreover, there is a shared belief in the need for a boycott of Russian culture. In the edited transcript, you will find detailed argumentation in favor of the Russian cultural boycott as well as replies to concrete issues that had media coverage. Other themes discussed concern the role cinema and film festivals can play in the face of war. The participants acknowledge the trauma that is being inflicted on the Ukrainian people and express hope that safety will be restored quickly, for this is a basic condition necessary to start thinking about and giving substance to the role of cinema and film festivals in dealing with war trauma.

Since the conversation in April, several festival collaborations have taken place or are planned. For instance, part of the program of Docudays UA (Ukraine) International Human Rights Film Festival with a national Ukrainian competition was held at the Krakow Film Festival in late May, Filmfest Hamburg will host the national Ukrainian competition of the Molodist Kyiv International Film Festival in late September-early October (<https://www.filmfesthamburg.de/en/news/festival-im-festival/>), and the national Ukrainian competition of the Odesa International Film Festival will be hosted by the Warsaw International Film Festival in October (<https://oiff.com.ua/en/festival/news/the-national-competition-of-the-13th-oiff-will-be-held-at-the-warsaw-international-film-festival1654681281.html>). Several colleagues have been and are organizing screenings

of Ukrainian films, also within the context of the Ukrainian Film Festival Berlin (<https://www.uffberlin.de/>). Meanwhile, at the time of writing this edited version in August, various sanctions against Russia have been imposed and (further) delivery of heavy weaponry is being discussed in Europe and the United States. The war is still ongoing with no immediate peace negotiation in sight.

Skadi Loist: I would like to start with a little story of how this event came about. When we first heard about the terrible invasion, I was sick in bed with COVID after the Berlinale [Berlin International Film Festival] and was quite in shock about it. A week or so later, our NECS colleagues, especially Michał Pabiś-Orzeszyna and Dagmar Brunow, had already started to organize an event with colleagues at the Lviv Center for Urban History (<https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/discussions/preserving-the-now/>), which I found very touching and also very informative, and really helpful in terms of connecting to colleagues about their work and not just about them being victims of a war. For me, this perspective was very important. I was starting to think about what we could do from the festival world and how to get in touch. Then, a few days later, I had a call-for-action email in my inbox from Bohdan Zhuk from Molodist (<https://molodist.com/en/article/russia-has-started-a-full-scale-war-against-ukraine>), whom I had met a few years earlier at Mezipatra, the Queer Film Festival in Prague. Then a couple days later, when I was going out for dinner in Berlin, meeting up with friends, it happened to be the same day that Anastasiia arrived in Berlin, finding a refuge in an apartment for a while with those friends. When my friends mentioned that Anastasiia was working also in the film sector, I said that when she felt settled, she should get in touch. She did, and she mentioned that she's actually also working with film festivals, and that's how it all fell into place. Because, as we realized, it's a really small world in the festival sector. You can travel around the world visiting festivals and make friends all over. So that's kind of how it started, trying to set up an event with Anastasiia. We discussed it, and she then really helped to connect with several people and also encouraged us to organize the event in a way so that we get an idea about the whole country. But maybe you want to say a bit more about why you chose and connected us to these colleagues.

Anastasiia Puhach: Sure. Here we can find speakers from five Ukrainian film festivals. I'm glad to welcome **Anna Machukh**. She's the executive director of the Ukrainian Film Academy and founder of the academy, and also executive director of the Odesa International Film Festival (<https://oiff.com.ua/en>). This is one of the biggest film festivals in Ukraine every year. It probably gathered the most important Ukrainian filmmakers and lots of foreign filmmakers and some stars from the film industry. Also here is **Bohdan Zhuk**. He's a programmer of Molodist International Film Festival (<https://molodist.com/en>); this is not only the oldest film festival in Ukraine but [also] one of the oldest in Europe. Last year it was the fiftieth edition of the festival and this festival specialized in debut films, and I was happy to also be a part of this festival for some years.... Also here is **Yevgeniya Kriegsheim** [from] Kharkiv MeetDocs Film Festival (<https://meetdocsfestival.com/en/>). This is a documentary and feature film festival which happens in Kharkiv. Last year it was the fifth edition and I'm also a part of this festival. Also here is **Victoria Leshchenko**. Victoria probably was the first person I thought about when this, your idea, came in. She is a program director of Docudays UA (<https://docudays.ua/eng/>), the international documentary film festival, probably the biggest documentary film festival in Ukraine. It has a competition and a film industry department. After I gathered these four speakers, Yevgeniya

suggested that we should invite a representative from film festivals from western Ukraine, and she suggested to invite **Olha Reiter** from Wiz-Art Lviv International Short Film Festival [<https://wiz-art.ua/festival/en/>]. This is the biggest festival in western Ukraine, which also has a competition and film industry department. So here are our speakers.

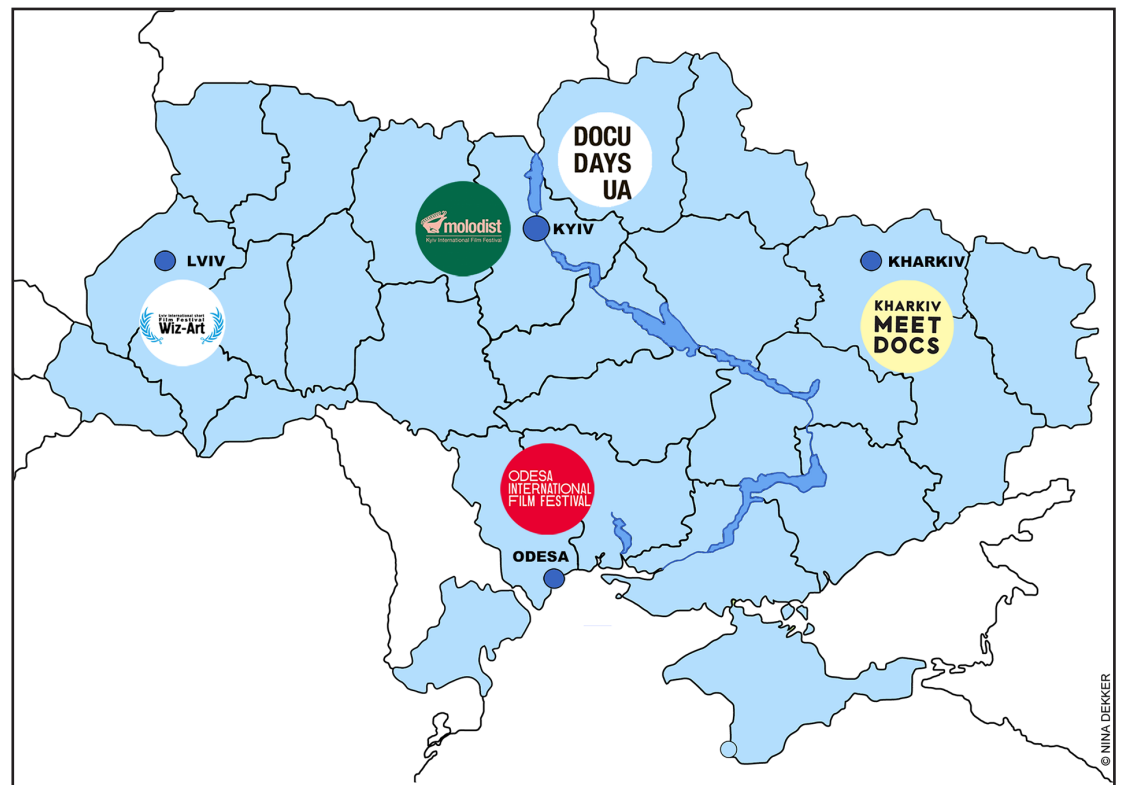


Figure 1. Map of Ukraine with locations of film festivals. © Nina Dekker.

Skadi Loist: Welcome and thank you for being here with us. Marijke, do you want to start with the first round of questions?

Marijke de Valck: Yes, thank you. We would very much like to start with the basic question of what is going on right now for the different festivals that our speakers are affiliated with. So, may I pass the mike firstly to Victoria?

Victoria Leshchenko: As you may know, Docudays was canceled this year, or postponed, as we like to say. The festival dates were supposed to be the last week of March—March 25 to April 3. Before the war we were actually in the active phase of preparations for the festival. So, we [had] already closed the program; we were already negotiating with distributors and everything. I clearly remember that on February 23, that was one day before the war, we had a team planning [meeting], we were planning some things, were discussing because it was already obvious that something is going to happen, but honestly saying, till the very last moment nobody believed it. So, we were planning the festival, while kind of thinking about a Plan B, but actually we didn't have that. I remember that when we were on Zoom, my dear colleague said: "well you know I got a message from one of our Ukrainian filmmakers, he's in the east of Ukraine, and he is saying that tomorrow you should just leave Kyiv because tomorrow the war will start." And, you know, the

very next day this happened. We were unprepared and we didn't manage to relocate, because we didn't plan that. It took some weeks for our team to basically relocate ourselves or whatever, and the biggest part of our team is still in Ukraine—mostly in the western part of Ukraine—some of us are relocated abroad, and there are a few people I know also moved. So, anyway we're still working and continuing our work because two years of lockdown taught us, in a way, how to operate under strange circumstances and circumstances where you cannot be physically in one office.

At the moment, we are continuing to work on the projects.... Basically, we have three directions where we're headed. The first one is cultural diplomacy. We're working with making Ukrainian voices visible abroad, at international film festivals, and we're also contributing to the campaign of boycotting Russian culture and at least explaining why it's important to also pause Russian culture a bit. The second thing is, of course, that we support the industry, Ukrainian filmmakers. We have launched an initiative, "Docu help fund," and are collecting money for Ukrainian filmmakers and providing them with very basic grants, survival grants basically, for equipment or anything like that. The third thing, we are now developing a project; we are going to create an online platform, basically an online closed library, which will be a collection of videos which are proof of crimes. So, this will be videos sent by different people, by journalists; we are going to do a kind of selection work and then structure and gather it and get everything to one place. Ideally that will be a place for professionals to find any content they need for any day of the war. So that's where we are now.

Marijke de Valck: Thank you, you're already telling us so much about how you're handling the current situation. Let's continue with the inventory of what the situation for the different festivals in the different parts of the country is. Yevgeniya, could you tell us about your festival?

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: I thank you. Hello, I'm Yevgeniya Kriegsheim. I'm a producer based in Berlin and Kyiv, between Berlin and Kyiv, but now unfortunately only in Berlin, and my hometown is Kharkiv; that's why I founded this, the first time it was a festival of documentary film for human rights [called Kharkiv MeetDocs]. It was launched in 2017 in Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine, with the support of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in five years our festival has become a significant event in eastern Ukraine. We have already had various formats and scales of the festival, and in 2020, for example, due to the red quarantine COVID zone in the region, we moved completely from a stationary offline format to a full online version in only one week. It was a challenge, but we managed it. The hardest thing was to persuade the filmmakers to agree to give us their films for showing on the web platform and security guarantees, which are used by, for example, international streaming platforms. Last year in order to be able to reach the audience not only in the east of Ukraine but also in other regions, we held the festival in hybrid form for the first time. Also, for the first time in the history of the festival, we launched an international competition, Ukraine through the Eyes of the World, where foreign directors presented their films, which they shot in Ukraine or about Ukraine. Every year there were fewer and fewer films about the war in our program. It's not a fact of common knowledge, but during the two years before 2022 only sporadic armed conflicts took place. We hoped for diplomatic peaceful settlement, but it ended in a full-scale Russian invasion. All the forces of our festival were focused on the voice of these regions, on the unification of the once-Ukrainian lands. I want

to believe that our contribution to the development of the cultural diplomatic mission in this region has consequences also today. Even though our festival runs always in autumn, I think this year unfortunately we'll, all of us, have to go back to an online format, and that's maybe good; we can cover not only Ukrainians in Ukraine, and we have something to talk about and something to say.

Anna Machukh: Hello, I'm Anna Machukh from Odesa International Film Festival. Thank you everyone, thank you for the support, and thank you for the invitation. So, we have the same situation as Yevgeniya said. We have our festival in July, in Odesa, and we were preparing; nobody believed that a full-scale invasion is possible. So, my team is almost all here in Kyiv. I'm also in Kyiv. From the first days of the full-scale invasion, we started to defend on the information front. We threw all our efforts into influencing in this situation and preventing Russia from spreading propaganda, because, you know, it's the second front; it's also a weapon. So, from the second day of the war, we started ... boycotting of the Russian cinema, because when other countries impose economic political sanctions against Russia, they continue its active work in the cultural field—my colleagues all know the situation—and the result of this activity is it's not only spreading the propaganda messages, it [also] contributes to increasing loyalty among the population of this country to the Russian culture. So, we call on the global film community to refuse cooperation with this Russian cinema, and our position has already been supported by a lot of different film organizations. The first one was the European Film Academy; also some academies from Poland, Spain, and others—a lot of others; also film production companies, Disney, Warner Brothers, Sony; some associations like the European Producers Club and the UK producers' body, PACT; and also Netflix and some others.² We are also helping our colleagues in Ukraine with equipment, with some aid; partners, friends from Poland and from other countries are helping us with this. A week ago now, we organized, we launched the film marathon for helping other filmmakers. It's film screenings around the world in support of Ukraine and it's a common initiative of the Ukrainian State Film Agency and some other Ukrainian organizations. We called it CinemAid Ukraine [<https://www.cinemaid.org/>] and already started screenings in Canada, Turkey, and Poland, and we have a big list of countries where we will continue our screenings. So, such is the situation for our festival and our activities now.

Bohdan Zhuk: Molodist's fifty-first edition was supposed to take place from May 28 to June 5 and naturally it's impossible at the moment, so we have announced officially that we have postponed the festival indefinitely because we are confident that Ukraine will win, and we have hopes that it's going to happen sooner rather than later. We are of course not clear how the situation is going to develop, but we are still hoping that we will be able to organize the festival this year. It will have to be from scratch, because anything that we have worked on is kind of canceled basically. So, currently we are working, [but] the only thing we can do in terms of organizing the festival is programming, so we are working on the program, but of course we are, like our colleagues, working on the information front and the cultural front. We are involved with cultural diplomacy. We have called on our international colleagues to boycott Russian cinema. We have received numerous requests about curating Ukrainian film programs for other festivals or institutions, and we have stated that we will be cooperating with them only on the condition that there won't be any Russian films in their programs. We are also sharing

2. On the European Film Academy, see "Unequivocal Solidarity with Ukraine," *European Film Academy*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.europeanfilmacademy.org/unequivocal-solidarity-with-ukraine/>.

information, connecting people, because there is of course a lot of solidarity among our foreign colleagues and they are trying to help and so we connect, we engage them, we support with the funding and each of us is volunteering in one way or another—working together for the common goal of victory. In terms of our team, some of us have stayed in Kyiv, some of us are in other places in Ukraine, like I am in my hometown in western Ukraine and I'm in the darkness because there's a curfew and we don't turn on the light in the evenings because of the possibility of air raids, and so all the cities and towns and villages are dark at night, completely dark. One of our colleagues is in eastern Ukraine; she's a filmmaker as well, Alisa Kovalenko. She's programming our documentary competition. Some of our colleagues are abroad as well, and we are working on different events abroad as well.

Olha Reiter: Hello everybody, Lviv is considered to be a relatively safe place now. We hear bomb alarms sometimes at night, but as you may know many people from eastern and central Ukraine moved to Lviv. The population of the city grew [immensely], so we had seven hundred, around eight hundred thousand people in the city and now we have more than a million already registered. Our festival was founded in 2008. I think it's the oldest short film festival in Ukraine, but we are not huge. That's our specific feature, so we have a big audience. We planned to have the festival in October; now, we didn't cancel it. The times of quarantine taught us to have festivals online, and I'd like to show you the online cinema that we created especially for this purpose: it's www.bigshort.com.ua. Now, we are screening four programs of Ukrainian short films there, and if you buy a ticket, we will donate all the money to Voices of Children Foundation. You know that a lot of Ukrainian children are victims in this war, so this fund is a trusted fund, and it was for those victims. So, I would ask you to watch, share this link within your communities, and combine the pleasure of watching films and donating some money to trustworthy funds. Besides that, our program team is working on some curation, programs for the next edition. Maybe in bomb shelters, maybe only online, but we hope to have at least some events. Our team is partly abroad, partly still in Lviv. I'm abroad personally and three of our male team members joined Ukrainian armed forces. Our press coordinator is defending the south of Ukraine now. So, it's very personal to all of us, and in 2014 we had the festival after the war started, because it's an old war; now it's a full-scale war and our slogan was "stronger than weapon," and we truly believe that culture is stronger than weapons. But now it seems that this slogan is not true anymore, because what we need now are a lot of weapons, and of course we need to go on with the culture at the same time, so maybe our slogan could be "culture and weapon"—I don't know, just a joke.

Marijke de Valck: It's great to hear about all the things that you continue to do, all the different activities. There are similarities between the festivals, some that are postponing events or, of course, were forced to postpone because of the timing in the festival calendar. Perhaps you could comment more about how you are collaborating at the moment among the different film festivals. Are you frequently in touch with each other or are you, maybe, focusing on your own festivals?

Anna Machukh: I didn't say anything about our plans regarding Odesa International Film Festival because it's in July. I still don't have an answer—whether we will be able to hold a festival live in July in Odesa—because it totally depends on the results of our army, but we have a plan B, we

have a plan C and also a plan D. So, plan B, yes, it's a festival online. Personally, me, I hate online events really, because in 2020 during the first COVID wave all our life was online, and we also had our festival online. Last year we were lucky; we had an in-person festival in Odesa. But this Plan B is always with us while COVID is with us, and now especially. And we also have Plan C: to postpone our festival to maybe September or October. And also, regarding your question, we also have plan D, because we've got a lot of offers from our partners from European festivals to hold some programs on their venues, some screenings. So, we appreciate the support, it helped, and so it may be possible that we will have a mixed format of the festival, very international, because screenings will be, for now, in a few different countries and also with some online and live formats. It will be possible in Ukraine.

Skadi Loist: Olha, I heard that you're also going to be in Dresden later this week, as will I. Are you showing a program there?

Olha Reiter: Yes, I will present a program of Ukrainian short films there. The entrance is free, and it's only on the festival website because they didn't expect that the war would begin.... The last couple of weeks, we negotiated about that [entrance fee]. Anyway, the question was about: how do we communicate with the Ukrainian film community? I think now, the film community is part of the cultural community, and we are really united now. Of course, there are some exclusions, but I think right after the war began some messenger chats, groups, were created and people started actively proposing things, some protests, and some cooperation. So, this is not new to us, and I think we were preparing to work online for a couple of years before and I think it's important to stay together as a community. I also know, and I think Victoria knows, that because we are alumni of SOFA School of Film Advancement, there is a possibility for Ukrainian, not filmmakers but film managers, to join their workshop in May, but it will be held online. That's it for me, regarding this question.

Bohdan Zhuk: I'll continue maybe. I guess we are in touch, all the Ukrainian film industry, we are in touch and we are connected and we are sharing information and opportunities and everything. But I have the impression our efforts are focused on the exterior, because we've seen that our cultural diplomacy takes time and now we have to push harder. So, we are working with our foreign colleagues and push for more attention for Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian film in particular, and we are working to oppose Russian propaganda.

Marijke de Valck: Could you give some examples of how you are doing this?

Bohdan Zhuk: Well, for instance, we have made a statement about the boycotts of Russian cinema. So, we—like the Ukrainian Film Academy, like our other colleagues, and I think the majority at least, if not all of the Ukrainian film industry—have called for the boycott of Russian cinema, because we have been quite disappointed, to be honest, in some of the reactions of our colleagues at some of the other international film festivals, especially the bigger ones. We understand that we need to explain that we are not barbarians and we are not against freedom of speech or anything, or freedom of expression, but that this is the first measure that has to take place, because we believe that Russia has to be completely isolated for a long time, until we see not only the withdrawal of its troops from Ukraine and the compensation of all the damage and

the trial in international tribunals but also structural changes in the policies of that country. So, we have to explain why this has to happen, because we understand that the world is very much under the influence of the “great Russian culture” and it’s hard for many people to accept that there can be a boycott in some way, although of course we have pushed for different institutions to cancel cooperation with Russia. And like I said before, we have received requests for cooperation for curating Ukrainian film programs for other festivals, and we told them that this can only happen if there are no Russian films in their programs, in their selection, because neither we nor the filmmakers that we intend to support and promote will find it acceptable to be part of the representation of the culture of the aggressor, whose aim is to erase us and to erase our culture. So, it’s quite simple, and I’m glad to say that there is quite a lot of understanding among our foreign colleagues and several festivals have already agreed to that.

Skadi Loist: Since we are on the topic of how you collaborate and we’ve heard a few examples of having collaborations with international festivals, which sounds like you are promoting Ukrainian film mostly, I would like to ask you to flip it the other way around. Are you also thinking about doing something for the audiences who are still in Ukraine? Is there anything that you can do at the moment?

Victoria Leshchenko: Maybe I can contribute to answering this question. It’s like my personal opinion—maybe my colleagues will disagree with it—but for our team it became really obvious, that at this very sad and tragic moment for our country, a film festival is not something people really are looking for. I mean, I personally had this experience of being in Kyiv for one week, literally being paralyzed and unable to work, just at all, and people, like in Kyiv and other cities, they are now mostly looking for humanitarian help for food, for basic stuff. So, I think now, I understand this is a really huge privilege to attend film screenings or to attend a film festival. To have a film festival is a huge privilege. I never saw it this way, because it was my life in Ukraine and now a lot of Ukrainian filmmakers are not working on their movies. They became volunteers just helping people, transferring them from Kyiv to Lviv or transferring some humanitarian stuff, and this is how we make a brand-new world, a brand-new reality. That’s also connected to the fact why we see it as important to share our situation at international film festivals, to speak for the Ukrainian film community, because lots of people from this community just now don’t have the possibility to speak publicly at these festivals for themselves. This is a huge problem because what we also always mention is that when you are giving a space for Russian filmmakers and for Russian film, it’s just not the same situation, even for Russian filmmakers who are in exile, or in opposition, it’s still very easy for them. They come to festivals, bring their films, but Ukrainian filmmakers can’t do so, they can’t comment on that, on the whole situation. So, that’s why of course, that’s why we still contribute to cultural diplomacy, but for our festival we see, unfortunately, no sense in doing screenings at the moment in Ukraine, and we rather create some projects which are really needed now in our society: for example, if we can at least collect all those videos, proof of crimes of Russians, it’s something which makes sense in this new reality.

Marijke de Valck: I can imagine that there are other speakers who want to respond or add to this.

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: Well, I can add only, what Victoria already mentioned, what we can do for our Ukrainians in Ukraine at the moment is to collect, and Docudays festival has already

begun this collection and archiving of this video footage of crimes. And it's what we can do in this moment and also for the people in Ukraine. Perhaps my colleagues will agree with me, we urge all those who witness these crimes in these terrible days [to] record it on any digital device to transfer such data to this archive. You can use all our platforms; we will organize a central archiving of these documents and give it to Docudays festival. So that's our first proposal for this year.

Olha Reiter: Maybe I'll add to this and remind [us] about some other Ukrainian film festival called Linoleum. They created this flash mob within the Ukrainian animators community about the death of [Vladimir] Putin, and I think it's an artistic way of putting some energy in some action, especially the artists from the cities that are now in the center of war. The question is so complicated for me now, the role of the rest of the film festivals right now, that I don't have a good answer, even for me. I think our role should be reconsidered, and we will not go back to the way it was held before, after the war, after we win. We should find some other way to talk to the audience, to people. Many people will be traumatized, we are traumatized, and I'm not talking as a victim of all of this, but this is just a reality, and we just understand it from a psychological point of view. It's not going to happen that the world stops, and we just go back to cinemas and enjoy some films. I think we will talk more and watch films last, that's my guess, I don't know. But yeah, I'm not able to watch films right now, even though I'm in safety in Germany. It's so difficult just to concentrate my attention on some drama, when you have a big drama in your own country, in your own life. So yeah, I think we need to think about it in our teams, with ourselves, and also with our community. Maybe the film academy will unite us.

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: Can I say one more thing please. The war in our country was already always there since 2014 and we tried to speak about this in the frame of our festival. Now, I see that after the war, when we get our territories back, we will have therapy, not only the people from the Donbas, Donetsk, and Luhansk region, [but] we will have therapy with our programs and panel discussions also for people from everywhere of Ukraine.

Marijke de Valck: Most of you mentioned that you are using the knowledge that you acquired during COVID to handle this new, and in many ways completely different, crisis. I was wondering if you could comment on that a bit more specifically. What are the things that continued to be helpful and what really is different now?

Victoria Leshchenko: Well, it's a very interesting comparison, you know—this lockdown time and this new time for us. I would say for me it's so different, and very difficult to compare these, because when it was lockdown, like two years of online, we've been doing the festival for two years online and Docudays was actually the first festival in Ukraine to be converted to online in 2020, and this was a really successful festival edition. But back then, even though the situation was quite challenging, I remember that that was just a problem to solve and somehow you were still in control of your life and you can control a lot of stuff especially on the Internet. It's very easy to control things; I think it's much easier than you know in the real physical world. But what we actually learned, what I personally learned from this war, is about this extreme fragility of the world. Once you have this experience, basically of having war in your country, of experiencing these bomb attacks, you realize that the world is so fragile—like you never ever could imagine that, because in normal life you think there are things you have for granted, there are things that

will be still here, and there are some grounds that you can use in real life, but this shows us that there is basically nothing, in one day you can lose everything. This is very difficult to explain to other people because it's a very personal experience, deep in your body, and once you have it, it's quite difficult to plan anything, like plan projects, plan festivals. For me lockdown times were really very soft times. I remember those times with nostalgia, those were really good times now. But those new times showed me the extreme fragility of things. It, in a way, creates this wall between me and other people, because people really try to understand; they're very empathetic, they ask what can we do. But you look at these people and you know that they don't know, they don't know that in just one day everything can change so easily. So, I think for making projects, for making festivals, this is all obviously a very new, a very complicated and challenging situation. The Docudays team, 100 percent of the Docudays team, is a team of extreme professionals. So, what we did in 2020 is a miracle, I would say, and so we can basically do anything and create anything we want. But this situation is, I think, is much more dangerous and challenging than it was in 2020 unfortunately, because we deal with things which are dangerous. Well, it already all started ages ago. But already in 2014, when war started in Ukraine, I should admit that personally I and a lot of people we were blind, because we were thinking that it will never happen to Kyiv, because it's Kyiv and nobody will come to Kyiv, and we were so arrogant in thinking that and actually not realizing about the danger that Russia and Russian people can potentially bring to our country. So that's why I really don't know at the moment how to handle these issues, because it's like a very personal thing; it's literally genocide, it's ... the story about how to actually erase Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian nation. And when you deal with these kinds of things, you can't just build a project or create a film festival to oppose that, I don't know. So yeah, that's how I personally feel about this.

Marijke de Valck: Perhaps, Anna, would you also like to give your take on that?

Anna Machukh: Regarding COVID? Yes, the COVID experience. You know, I totally agree with Olha Reiter that we will need to change something in our festivals, and I think we will talk about this with my colleagues after. Because we have all technical equipment to hold the festival online; after the COVID situation we know how to do this, but I'm not sure that we could do this, in this situation. Our people [have] had deep trauma after these events of the war, and we will need to change everything. So, I don't think that the experience of holding festivals during COVID will help us much.

Marijke de Valck: Is there perhaps anyone else of the other speakers who would like to say something about that?

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: Yes, the online format is something that I can say was a challenge for us and it's something that for the twenty-first century is something normal; maybe festivals of the future will be in VR [virtual reality] space or something like this. But to compare with the war and this situation, you have also as an organizer, sometimes you just have to put your hands down, because you watched the videos or photos from Bucha³ or something like this, and it's just, if you can do everything with an online format you can because you are professional and that is communication then, now it's just very hard to believe that it happens with your hometown, homeland, and that's another feeling on that.

3. In early April, evidence of the Bucha massacre emerged showing images of many dead bodies of Ukrainian civilians murdered by Russian Armed Forces in Bucha, a suburb outside of Kyiv.

Browne, Malachy, David Botti, and Haley Willis. 2022. "Satellite Images Show Bodies Lay in Bucha for Weeks, Despite Russian Claims." *New York Times*, April 4, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/world/europe/bucha-ukraine-bodies.html>.

Bohdan Zhuk: Yes, I was going to say that we were talking with colleagues after February 24, after this whole thing escalated—the war, you know, affected us more and more—we were talking about our festival experiences, preparing us for this actually, because like now we know what we have been prepared for, because working at our festivals, we have small teams and we are handling a lot of things, so we are multitasking, we are handling a lot of stress and a lot of responsibilities. And so after this started we were not panicking, we were just working on, you know, considering what we can do—like one, two, three things that we can do—and we are handling a lot of things at the same time. In terms of COVID, we, at Molodist, were quite lucky to have in both years physical editions and we did hybrid festivals both years. We had funding to build the online platform in 2020, and we had part of the program online of the films, as well as some industry events were online, but still because the festival was happening physically, our main focus was on the physical events. So, for us the online part was not very successful, and that's why we are not really excited to go back to that, and we would only do it as a last resort now. But I think we also learned with COVID more flexibility, working remotely, like last year I was volunteering for a few months in Portugal and at the same time I was programming our festival and doing other things and [had] the same concerns [as] my colleagues. So, we realized [that] some of them are a bit more old-fashioned and like to have a hands-on process, and then we just realized that we can do basically anything from anywhere.

Skadi Loist: Maybe [we should have] another question [about] audiences and the collective experience of the festival. Coming out of the COVID experience that we all had, like cinemas being closed, the festivals going online, I think all of us felt the urge to go back to the festival experience, to have a space where you actually talk. I'm wondering—and I completely hear what you said before, that, you know, people are traumatized and they might not think about a festival and not about arts and celebration—maybe I'm an idealist or naïve, but I could imagine that a festival could also be a place in the future, getting back the collective space and talking about something else than just the war experience through art but also, you know, not just as a party but as coming together again. And would that also be something that you see in the future of your festivals? Maybe a specific focus of how programming might be thought of when your festivals can happen again?

Victoria Leshchenko: I can only say, you know, like small secrets. I have a friend and he's now in Kyiv and he's now part of city military groups—they're like volunteers but also officially part of Ukraine's army. And he told me that in the evening they were watching [films], actually, like, in their, let's say, office, if you can say so; yeah, you know, people watch films in Ukraine, but, you know, under these kinds of strange circumstances. But I don't know, honestly, I think that I know that lots of people are looking forward to Docudays. I got messages not only from audiences but also from filmmakers who really want their films to be on the screen, and I know for sure, as soon as the city and the country will be liberated, we will do the festival. Even so, you know, maybe there won't be cinemas, I don't know, so we'll find a way, and I know for sure that people will come no matter what. Because Docudays is very important, because it's not only just a film festival, it's a human rights festival. So, it was always a place of solidarity, it was always about human rights, it's also about a huge community of activists who are close friends and close people to the festival. So, I see our future somewhere in Kyiv, you know, maybe some broken buildings and everything, but we are doing the film festival, I don't know, somewhere, maybe it

won't be a cinema at all, but I know for sure there will be a lot of people watching our films. So, I think, I don't see a problem here; I mean, I think it's just a very temporary thing, but the problem, like the main problem, is it's the worst situation; it could last much longer than unfortunately we expect it to be. So, at the moment, yes, at the moment we can't say so, [we] only can say that people still watch films, it's true.

Olha Reiter: I would like to go back to what I said before about trauma. From what I read and from what I experienced myself, war experience is a big trauma. Also it's a moment of you uniting in your nation with your people. It is a moment of big kindness, and many people in Ukraine and abroad are really united around the war. It's strange to say but many people feel together. I feel more together than ever with everyone in Ukraine. Many people volunteer, like we have a so-called festival 24/7 in Ukraine right now; it is just not a film festival. People are there together. You're safer together just doing something, not sitting and waiting until bombs will kill you. I think right after we will get basic privileges like safety and peace—and I think my colleagues will agree—we will do our best to do whatever we can, and I'm sure we can do it sooner than we did before, just to rebuild our festival teams and create the festival and also the cinematic experience together. But what I meant before [is] that we need to live through the events now and to dive into what we're experiencing now to know what to do later. Maybe we can plan our festivals from scratch now, we can imagine what we will do, but we will know only after we get just basic safety and after we will win and after Russian aggression will be stopped.

Marijke de Valck: That brings us to the many calls to action that you've already expressed during this talk. You mentioned cultural diplomacy, the work that you are doing curating programs with Ukrainian films for other festivals, several initiatives that are meant to be raising funds that help people in the film industry and your teams, and also the cultural boycott. Are there other calls for actions that we haven't dealt with yet that you would like to bring across on this platform?

Olha Reiter: People are very flexible, and I think we will, we can get used to what is going on easily, somehow. Many of my relatives who are back in Ukraine, they say we got used to fire alarms and everything, and I think it's important not to get used to it. You could support Ukraine by sharing trusted, trustworthy news, you could not stop sharing everything because it's easy to forget about it, especially when you're in a safe place somewhere abroad, especially when you're far away.

Marijke de Valck: Yes, thank you for that. You're absolutely right about that. That also links to one of the debates that is being raised in the chat about the case of Sergei Loznitsa, one of the Ukrainian filmmakers who was expelled from the Ukrainian Film Academy. There are several people asking what the take of the speakers is on that issue.

Anna Machukh: Yes, I'm also the director of the Ukrainian Film Academy and I already sent a message to guests [in the chat] regarding Sergei Loznitsa. You know the reason, the last reason was that his films were included in the film festival in Nantes, France, titled "From Lviv to the Urals"; it's a Russian Film Festival and it was the final reason, because if you will search his interviews on the Internet you will find that he's repeated narratives which are very similar to Putin's narratives about Ukraine, the country which was founded in 1991, and he also said that

he is a director also from Russia, from Ukraine, and from other countries, so he doesn't identify himself as a Ukrainian director, and we can also see this in his films. So, this decision to take part in the festival with Russian films, with Ukraine and Russian films, was the last point to make this decision. Maybe my colleagues can also add something because you know it was a common decision of, I think, our industry. We received a lot of messages, a lot of calls from my colleagues who supported and who agree totally with the decision of the Ukrainian Film Academy.

Bohdan Zhuk: Well, yeah, I agree that Loznitsa, while he is a prominent filmmaker who has been associated with Ukraine, it's not very simple, and I think in the past he chose to be Ukrainian when it was convenient to him and in other times he didn't. So, he should not be the speaker representing the whole filmmaking and film industry of Ukraine, because also he doesn't live in Ukraine and hasn't lived there for a very long time and his reality is different. Also, oftentimes he's reproducing narratives that are very convenient for Russian propaganda. So, we believe that the Ukrainian filmmakers, because a lot of international film media have been addressing him as one of the most prominent filmmakers associated with Ukraine, but we believe that there are a lot of us in the Ukrainian film industry who can also talk about things and who have different opinions and we should be addressed. That brings me to the issue of the narratives that have been taken away from Ukrainians for a very long time because our voices have been muted, have been silenced for a very long time by Russians, also by other Europeans, and so we find that now we should be more vocal and we should assert ourselves and our vision, because we also find in the media that some perspectives are reproducing the colonialist narratives of Russia and they are not seeing Ukraine as an independent separate entity. So, we are fighting basically against that.

Marijke de Valck: Thank you, that is clear. There's also another question in the chat that has to do with the cultural boycott of Russian culture and this person says, I will just quote it: "Boycotting films which have received support from Russian state institutions is completely understandable, but what about Russian filmmakers who are also under fire and critical of their government, are these examples also red listed?" The person is saying: "I'm very sorry I do not have any concrete example of such filmmakers or their films and am just curious to know if there are also allies in the cultural community in Russia."

Victoria Leshchenko: I can try to comment a bit on that and I would really appreciate if my colleagues could also contribute to this. This is, of course, a very challenging and unusual topic, you know, because, yes, we are faced with the fact that of course banning Russian culture ... is ... important..., but this is not something which is going to happen in reality quickly, for obvious reasons. We can like these reasons or not, but under those circumstances, I see our way also to creatively adapt to the situation and explain and share with people why it's actually so important. For us,... I think that Bohdan mentioned that, a problem of Russian culture is not that we don't like this culture. The problem is with the whole mindset behind this culture, because this is a very monumental culture which for many ages has been telling us that, yes, we have Dostoevsky, we have Tolstoy, and our culture is primarily important, it's a great culture, Russian culture, and your Ukrainian culture basically doesn't exist. So, that was something that for ages was a very common rhetorical device, especially during Soviet times, before Soviet times, and whatever. Nothing actually changed in Russia, over days here. So those messages and personally, they are very deeply in the mindset of Russians, and so I can only ask this question, what kind of

culture is that, this great Russian culture, which makes this awful cultural and humanitarian tragedy, catastrophe possible? So, for me, especially because I have Russian-speaking family of Ukrainians, you know, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, those were my books in childhood and I was pretty much influenced by that culture, I should say, and even for me it's now obvious, I don't understand this culture, I don't want this culture at all, I don't want it by any chance, no. The problem with this huge Russian culture, this huge narrative, is it's basically occupied the whole country and it doesn't appear in one day. So, for a long period, it had been created and some Russian people were contributing openly to that, of course, they were supporting and they were part of propaganda, but some Russian people, and they are also intellectuals, the best people of Russia, they were contributing just in keeping silent or just letting those things happen until they can write their reviews, until they can make films. Well, they can kind of tolerate things or they can criticize those things in the kitchen, but you know until they have possibility to work, they can do this and they will tell us, they will not criticize anything. I think it's even worse sometimes than open collaboration. We see now what we have, and now those, I would say the Russian cultural elite, they just leave the country. They're just leaving the country, and I don't understand actually how we can, how we are going to decide this, because it looks like only Ukrainian people have now to deal with Putin, with his regime, with all these consequences, which were pretty much empowered by Russian culture, and I think it's my personal belief that it's their whole task to go home now and to do their homework, because nobody will do that for them. Ukrainians will not do that for them, German people for sure won't do that for them, and if they all leave actually, what are we going to do here? I think it's pretty much their responsibility. I understand that it's scary, I understand that maybe it's impossible for some people to just tolerate this because of their decisions. Because every second we make a decision, like every second we made a choice; if we choose to keep silent it's also a choice, if we choose to tolerate some awful things it's also a choice, and we contribute in every second. I think for many people from the Russian cultural elite, this is their situation now; they were systematically contributing to keeping silence or just ignoring pretty much that big scope of reality, and I think now they have to live those consequences, because otherwise I don't understand really how we're going to proceed. That's why, at the moment, I don't feel any kind of sorrow for these people. I really get irritated when I see attempts to victimize Russians, Russian people, and the Russian cultural elite. It's just their situation and they created that pretty much. It's not just only one Putin you know; it's 70 percent of people in Russia thinking that war in Ukraine is a good thing to do, and those people were influenced by this Russian propaganda and by this pretty much Russian culture. So, I think this is a very serious thing and just saving Russians, people who are now trying to leave the country, I don't know. I see this as a big catastrophe and I think it's our responsibility to deal with that.

Skadi Loist: Do you want to ask your question from the chat in person, Elena?

Elena Razlogova [audience member]: I will start with the boycotts, just trying to find out whether you are calling for a boycott of films by ethnic Russians or are you also calling for boycott of any film coming out of Russia? And I was thinking of Yakutian cinema, or Sokurov's former students from Kabardino-Balkaria, such as Kantemir Balagov—because these filmmakers, because Russia is a colonial state still and these filmmakers represent these colonized people in Russia. So, I was just wondering what policy would you suggest in relation to these filmmakers?

Olha Reiter: Maybe I could explain a little bit more about the boycott of Russian culture and how I perceive you understand this. There are a lot of official statements about it, like the one of the Ukrainian Institute [<https://ui.org.ua/en/golovna-english/news/>]. Also our government talks about it, but it's important to understand personally why this is going on and why I am personally for boycotting any Russian film, even self-funded Russian film.... First of all, the rate of support of what is going on is very high in the Russian community according to some polls, and I think there is much work that needs to be done within Russian society, and especially those people who have a different point of view should feel an uncomfortable situation. You know, you cannot be a good Russian here and bad Russian there. You just need to feel a little bit uncomfortable, discomfort for yourself, and speak out about this situation, even boycott of your film. So, maybe some of your communities will hear about it and why it happened. Comparing to what Ukrainian people are experiencing now, I think it's nothing, it's really nothing, and this is a reason especially for those who have different opinions whether they are abroad, whether they're in their republics, especially in some republics of Russia who are underprivileged there, they should speak out to their communities and do something about this regime, spread the truth about what's going on. I think about Loznitsa, it's the same here. Once here, it was good for him to be Ukrainian when he needed state funding, he became Ukrainian, and another time he was Russian and now he's Russian again, Russian who thinks Ukraine is just small Russia or something like this. So, for me, I explained this as a temporary discomfort for those who spread culture which kills a lot of civilians and which occupies other countries, which occupied not only Ukraine [but also] many countries, many nations. That's it, that's why I am for it.

Victoria Leshchenko: Thank you, Olha, just thank you so much. We also had an idea I know to address, to write these independent Russians directly, to ask them, like as an act of solidarity, to cancel their screenings. So that was also an idea in our community. I don't know at the moment if it's active or not, but this is also a really good thing to do, because I think it's, as Olha said, it's the only thing actually, I think, if you are a good Russian, still I don't like this term, I think you can do, because otherwise I don't know. We have also, this is a bit of a funny idea, but maybe to, you know, program a voice of surrender before the screening of Russian films, which is also a way to do this kind of performance to remind people that Russia is at war with Ukrainians; it's important to remember that. I don't know, at the moment, I don't know actually what is a good and what is a bad decision. I can just be on the side of my people and our community, and we are going to do whatever it is to protect them and I think we can't just have this kind of dialogue with Russians, this kind of sympathy with Russians, we just, we need to survive, it's a very basic thing. So, at the moment it is as it is.

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: If you don't mind, I have one suggestion for maybe Russian filmmakers to follow. If you know the Russian director Vitaly Mansky, who just closed his festival in Moscow, like a statement, this is also a position that other directors and filmmakers should follow. But I don't know if we can still speak about this during the war; we can see the results and look how this is going on after the war. So, for me, this was also one very important signal. My suggestion was that they can do something like this, maybe.

Victoria Leshchenko: Well, just to add to the question of Vitaly Mansky, this is also a very good example, because of course everybody knows Vitaly Mansky for sure and he kind of does lots of

important things, and ArtDocFest, it's a truly important festival, but also while he was doing the festival in Russia, he had somehow also to collaborate with the state in a way. And, for example, we clearly know that one film script at ArtDocFest was filmed by Alyona Polunina, which basically was a film which kind of empowered the republic—it was pretty much a pro-republic film. Alyona Polunina was now a filmmaker who signed a list. It was a list of people who signed and said publicly that war in Ukraine is a good thing to do, and we have those facts. We can easily share this information, and that's just one very little example that those things were happening, even with the best people in Russia, even with such a project as ArtDocFest, because as they had to operate in Russia, they had somehow to have this balance, to collaborate, to do something to be able to have this festival in Russia. So, it's very tricky here, and sometimes when we speak about good Russians, we need also precisely to speak about every complete person, because there are lots of things which are not obvious, hidden, but when you start doing research this often is unpleasant.

Bohdan Zhuk: I was going also to add a couple of things. First of all, there is Alexander Sokurov, who is one of the most prominent Russian filmmakers. He signed or made a statement just this week, after the entire world has seen the horror that was in Bucha, the town near Kyiv, this Sunday, and now the whole world is closer to understanding why we call this a genocide. The statement Sokurov signed was saying: "if this is true." After all the proofs, all the evidence, everything that was online, like there can't be any doubts, but somehow they called this into question, and they are this way still reproducing Russian propaganda because that's what is happening now. That is what we see. In the last few days since Sunday, thousands of Russian bots, and not just bots, many people from Russia, are calling this into question or saying that this is false or staged or anything. So, my point is that even if some Russians, including Russian filmmakers, are against the war and are opposed to anything against Ukraine, they are still a lot of the time reproducing the narratives and having the same views, the chauvinist, colonialist views. So, that's why we call for the complete boycott.

Another thing that I wanted to add was that two days ago I was on the phone with the director of the European Film Academy and we were talking about the boycotts and related things, and what he told me was that when they were joining the boycott at the call of the Ukrainian film industry and of the Ukrainian Film Academy, they also checked with the Russian members, of which there are I think eighty or something like that, in the European Film Academy, and they have all agreed to the boycott. So, they have all backed this statement on the boycott of Russian cinema, which says something as well—that they understand why this has to happen, because it is to understand that Ukraine has been a colony of Russia for three centuries and now it needs to decolonize its narratives and we need to reappropriate what has been taken from us and our voices need to be amplified.

Anna Machukh: Can I add also, regarding the European Film Academy and Russian members of the academy—they agreed, but they are still silent. They're still silent, they didn't make a statement and the reason to boycott Russian cinema, and also about good Russians, about opposition, we all know the name of [Alexei] Navalny and his position regarding Crimea, regarding Ukraine, that Crimea is part of Russia, and it will not go back to Ukraine. So, the boycott of Russia and Russian culture is the only one way to stop this war, this genocide as Bohdan said, and not to

spread this invasion into other countries, because we should all understand that if Ukraine falls, Putin and Russia will go further to other countries.

Yevgeniya Kriegsheim: I urge everyone to boycott Russian modern culture. When Ukrainian filmmakers defend Ukrainian land with weapons, when they die from the hands of the Russian occupiers like Mantas Kvederavičius, when Ukrainian film and culture representatives are sitting in bomb shelters and are forced to flee, separated from their families, to support any Russian content is cynical. Secondly, Ukrainian festivals acutely need support from international partners, organizations, donations and grants, cooperation, roundtables, panel discussions with Ukrainian experts, filmmakers, representatives of culture—right now and here—it's time.

Marijke de Valck: I would like to thank all of the speakers very much for joining us and for not being silent and sharing your voices and your experiences from the different professional and personal backgrounds. These talks were really informative and great.... Thanks also to Anastasiia for helping us put this talk together, thanks to all the people who were present and by being present expressing their solidarity with you all and of course also for the questions that they asked. Skadi, do you have any final words?

Skadi Loist: Yeah, I want to also say thank you very much to everybody here, thank you very much to Anastasiia helping in the background, organizing, bringing us all together, and I'd like to finish this by saying that I hope this is not a goodbye but that we continue the conversation.

Anastasiia Puhach: I also wanted to thank you and all the speakers and especially about the last point about the boycott of Russian culture, I thank you a lot for this, which I also totally agree with and what will probably also be a point in our next discussions or questions. I'm often thinking about what films will appear after this war, after the victory, which films Ukrainian viewers would like to see.

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HOW TO CITE

Loist, Skadi, and Marijke de Valck. "Spotlight on Film Festivals in Ukraine Today: Accounts, Responses, Calls to Action." *Journal of Festive Studies* 4 (2022): 116–134. <https://doi.org/10.33823/jfs.2022.4.1.130>.

The Journal of Festive Studies (ISSN 2641–9939) is a peer-reviewed open access journal from H-Celebration, a network of [H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online](https://h-net.org/), and is the inaugural journal published through the [H-Net Journals](https://journals.h-net.org/jfs) initiative. It can be found online at <https://journals.h-net.org/jfs>.