

SOFA November 2021: Special New Concept Alumni Workshop

Between November 9-12 SOFA – School of Film Advancement held its very first Alumni workshop. Focusing on Female Leadership and Sustainability, the workshop took place virtually in the Polish Capital, Warsaw and alongside with keynotes, one-on-one meetings and a film screening, it offered intercultural exchange and networking for its participants.

Nikolaj Nikitin, SOFA Head of Studies: “SOFA was started in 2013 and after so many successful years with amazing participants we decided it's time to check on our Alumni and gather them in a very special workshop. This year, thanks to our partners Polish Film Institute, Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation and Heinrich Böll Foundation, as well as our main funders, the German Federal Foreign Office and the Creative Europe MEDIA Programme of the European Union, we virtually travelled to the beautiful city of Warsaw. This was our first ever SOFA Alumni workshop, a pilot project thanks to the very positive feedback from our participants and experts.



During the four-day long digital workshop SOFA Alumni had the opportunity to reflect on their SOFA projects and their current professional career with SOFA experts, focusing on female leadership and sustainability.

Ewa Puszczynska, renowned Polish film producer and returning SOFA tutor and **Izabela Kiszka-Hoflik**, founder at IHK Pictures Promotion and SOFA regional coordinator in Warsaw, held a conversation on “Making the film industry more diverse and equal”.

During their talk they highlighted the importance of training and education and joining forces to raise voices. “It’s time for women to create strong movements through the film-industry”, said Ewa Puszczynska, adding that this year’s new director class is 100% women in the Lodz Film School, where she is a tutor.

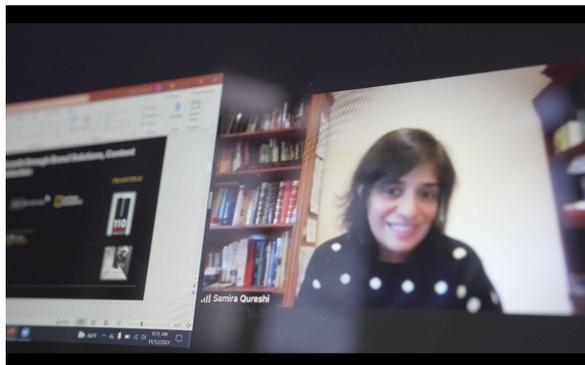
Izabela Kiszka-Hoflik is founding member of the organisation “Women in Film” in Poland, which started as a social movement and now is a registered organisation.

“Two weeks ago, we called the former First Ladies in Poland to come to the Belarussian border to see what is happening there. We didn't do it on our own, it was a joint movement with some other charity organizations. We called this meeting ‘Mothers on the border’ and two former First Ladies appeared.” Izabela Kiszka-Hoflik said, adding, “It was the first time that an organization was acting on behalf of women in Poland. It was not directly connected to the film industry but as a part of the whole movement we wanted to show our support.”

With the organisation “Women in Film”, Izabela Kiszka-Hoflik also made a codex with best practices on gender equality and discrimination in film productions, which can be used as a guidance for producers and staff members (<https://kobietyfilmu.pl/en/woman-in-film/>).



Our last Keynote was held by female leader **Samira Qureshi**, New York-based branding and advertising professional. She was introducing our participants on how to make a successful cooperation between brands and good causes with social responsibility.



“There are a lot of avenues you can take in terms of career focus. Marketing is a wide range and there are a lot of paths you can go, it’s just a matter of what you are interested in and what areas and disciplines you are looking to get into. For example, working with sponsorship and product placement or active and passive brand integration is about how brands actually want to communicate their brand points and messaging, making sure it seems authentic within these programmes, whether it is a film or a television show, and then also creating custom-branded content.” Adding, “This is way more interesting than a 30-second commercial spot. One of the goals for brands in this state, especially after Covid, is to create authentic storytelling narratives. ...the concept is really focused on human potential.”

Katja Schwarz, sustainability consultant, held a keynote “Greening the film industry” and offered one-on-one consultation on sustainable filmmaking and for building and office related cultural and media activities, saying: “There is no green without fairness, equal opportunities and chances, therefore I am very happy to talk about sustainability and not only about climate change”.

SOFA Head of Studies Nikolaj Nikitin held a keynote on “How to stay in love with your project”, where he gave inspiration, motivation and advice based on his personal experience for the Alumni.

Both Nikolaj Nikitin and **Berenika Partum**, SOFA supervisor and expert on funding international cultural projects, offered one-on-one meetings during the workshop. The one-on-one mentoring is a strong aspect in SOFA’s workshop methodology and a well-proven tool to give tailor-made updates to each participant.

During the workshop, in cooperation with **Little Cinema** (<https://www.littlecinema.net/>, New York, USA), SOFA did a very special online screening of I’M YOUR MAN (ICH BIN DEIN MENSCH) by **Maria Schrader**, followed by a Q&A with the producer of the film, **Lisa Blumenberg**, moderated by Ewa Puszczynska.

“The film was about what it means to be human, what each of us should ask ourselves



practically everyday”, introduced Ewa Puszczynska the film, adding, “I find it a great achievement, how the movie can open up to wider audiences, while it still remains an arthouse piece.”

“It is the potential of the heart and the soul and the brain which makes this film so special for me”, said Lisa Blumenberg about Berlinale and German Film Award-winner I’M YOUR MAN, which is a 2021 German science fiction romance and is Germany’s entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 94th Academy Awards.

SOFA eWarsaw Participants:

Ketie Danelia, producer of the 2021 Locarno Film Festival-winner WET SAND (SOFA Year 2013 | Georgia),

Kęstutis Drazdauskas, producer of the October’s Netflix hit THE FORGOTTEN BATTLE (SOFA Year 2014 | Lithuania),

Dorina Oarga, founder of TIFF Unlimited, VOD-Platform in Romania (SOFA Year 2015 | Romania),

Iris Elezi, filmmaker and former director of A Archive (SOFA Year 2016 | Albania),

Lizaveta Bobrykava, Head of Industry at Listapad International Film Festival (SOFA Year 2016 | Belarus),

Angelos Tsaousis documentary filmmaker and founder at Filmografik Productions (SOFA Year 2017 | Greece),

Gitit Wainer, CEO at Herzliya Cinematheque in Tel-Aviv (SOFA Year 2017 | Israel),

Tara Karajica, founder, Fade to Her - A Magazine About Women in Film & TV (SOFA Year 2017 | Serbia),

Agnieszka Kruk, script development expert, founder at StoryLab.pro (SOFA Year 2018 | Poland),

Marat Parkhomovsky, director of the 2021 Haifa International Film Festival-winner, TEL AVIV (SOFA Year 2018 | Israel),

Natia Nikoleishvili, executive producer and co-founder of Georgia Film Cluster (SOFA Year 2018 | Georgia),

Irena Gruca-Rozbicka, project manager of Crew United Polska (SOFA Year 2019 | Poland),

Pavel Brăila, visual artist and founder of Amar International Wedding Film festival (SOFA Year 2019 | Moldova),

Viki Antonopoulou, founder of Endorphin Film Sales (SOFA Year 2019 | Greece).

SOFA – School of Film Advancement is a programme of workshops aimed at strengthening national film industries and the European cinematic landscape and kick-starting projects in the realm of cinema. SOFA helps its participants advance their ideas into concrete projects, opening new avenues for application for financing programmes and final implementation. SOFA's focus on cultural managers and film entrepreneurs rather than producers and directors has made it a unique international film/AV programme.

SOFA – School of Film Advancement is a project of Filmplus gUG (Berlin), funded by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and Creative Europe – MEDIA Programme of the European Union. The 2021 eWarsaw workshop is kindly supported by: Polish Film Institute, Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation - Stiftung für deutsch-polnische Zusammenarbeit, and the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

For further information, please contact: office@joinsofa.org

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