

# **THE DOC ALLIANCE ROADMAP**

**A HANDBOOK  
ON FESTIVAL  
WORK**



Doc Alliance is a collaborative network of seven leading European documentary film festivals: CPH:DOX, Doclisboa, DOK Leipzig, FIDMarseille, Ji.hlava IDFF, Millennium Docs Against Gravity, and Visions du Réel. Each year, the network expands its reach by welcoming a guest festival, fostering new connections and extending the geographical scope of its collaborations.

This handbook is the result of a collective research effort undertaken by the network's members. Five key thematic areas were identified and distributed among the seven partners, who carried out in-depth research, analysis, and evaluation, resulting in a series of reports. These themes examine the role of festivals as vital platforms for emerging filmmakers and creators; the educational initiatives developed across the network, the commitment of festivals to inclusion, diversity, and environmental sustainability, and their engagement with new technologies, particularly the integration of VR and XR into their programmes. The findings draw on detailed studies of festival activities, interviews with festival management and participating filmmakers, and broader contextual research.

In addition to these research texts, the handbook also presents key insights from the roundtable discussion Festivals as Engines of Inclusion and Talent Development, held in the frames of the European Film Market 2026, with the participation of the Network of Festivals of the Adriatic Region and Golden Apricot IFF, the guest festival of that year. This publication offers a curated selection of these insights in condensed form.

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF FILM FESTIVALS  
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Film festivals play a vital role in introducing emerging filmmakers at the start of their careers to the complexities and opportunities of the cinematic industry. They serve as essential gateways, helping new talent navigate the film world while offering an entry point into the professional sphere. By providing a dynamic platform to showcase their work, festivals allow young filmmakers to gain visibility, recognition, and valuable critical feedback. Beyond public screenings, festival programs often include industry activities that foster meaningful connections with producers, distributors, critics, and fellow filmmakers—connections that can significantly shape future career paths.

Doc Alliance conducted a study to examine how film festivals influence the career trajectories of emerging filmmakers, particularly in terms of networking opportunities, industry recognition, professional development, and collaborative prospects. Through interviews with representatives from FIDMarseille, CPH:DOX, Doclisboa, DOK Leipzig, Ji.hlava, Millennium Docs Against Gravity, and Visions du Réel, the research explored their dedicated programs and initiatives and how these actively support emerging filmmakers.

## CPH:DOX

At CPH:DOX, supporting emerging filmmakers is a central priority, reflected in a range of dedicated initiatives designed to promote new cinematic voices. These include the NEXT:WAVE Competition, INTRO:DOX, DOX:ACADEMY+, and CPH:LAB. In addition, the festival regularly presents first and second feature films across multiple sections of its program, reinforcing its sustained commitment to early-career directors.

Launched in 2017, the NEXT:WAVE Competition is specifically devoted to first and second feature-length films. As part of the festival's official competition program, it offers emerging directors the opportunity to showcase their work on an international stage. This visibility allows them to reach broader and more diverse audiences while positioning them alongside established filmmakers. By foregrounding new voices within its main framework, the festival highlights the importance of fresh perspectives in documentary cinema and fosters a dynamic environment in which innovative storytelling can thrive.

INTRO:DOX is a curated industry initiative tailored to filmmakers and producers working on their first or second non-fiction feature. Over two intensive days of interactive sessions, participants connect with peers from around the world and gain practical insights into navigating the professional ecosystem. Designed to introduce emerging documentary professionals to the festival's industry community, the program helps participants strategically engage with Industry Days, strengthen their networks, and advance their projects through focused mentoring and exchange.

Expanding the festival's educational dimension, DOX:ACADEMY+ offers students a specialised accreditation granting full access to the film program alongside an intensive five-day academic track in Copenhagen during the festival.

Reserved for students from universities, film schools, and art academies, the program combines guest lectures, group discussions, curated screenings, and participation in festival events. Each class explores the intersection of theory and practice, bringing together students, educators, experts, and artists from diverse professional backgrounds to foster cross-disciplinary dialogue and critical engagement with contemporary documentary practices.

Finally, CPH:LAB, the festival's year-round development and incubation program, supports projects working with digital media and immersive or interactive elements. Running annually from September to March, it provides a structured yet exploratory environment in which emerging creators are encouraged to rethink and expand the notion of documentary in the digital era. By combining new technologies, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and risk-taking artistic visions, the lab functions as an ambitious space for experimentation. Participants push the boundaries of documentary filmmaking, developing innovative narrative forms and bold cinematic techniques.

Through these interconnected initiatives, CPH:DOX demonstrates a sustained commitment to nurturing emerging talent. By offering resources, mentorship, and international visibility, the festival cultivates a forward-looking environment in which new voices are empowered to shape—and continually redefine—the contemporary documentary landscape.

## DOCLISBOA

The Green Years program is one of the official initiatives dedicated to emerging filmmakers at Doclisboa. It provides an invaluable platform for students and first-time directors to immerse themselves in the dynamic environment of international film festivals. Carefully designed to introduce young artists to the professional film industry, the program offers a formative and potentially transformative experience at a crucial stage in their careers. Open to world and international premieres of European films of any length, Green Years presents an inclusive showcase of new cinematic voices and offers young directors the opportunity to present their work to an international audience.

A distinctive feature of Green Years is its sustained collaboration with educational institutions, including universities and art academies. Each year, one institution is selected to participate in a year-long framework of activities that extend beyond the festival period, enriching students' engagement with filmmaking through workshops, discussions, and curated exchanges.

At its core, Green Years is committed to fostering new talent. Through a dedicated competition section and jury, the program ensures that the creative efforts of young filmmakers receive focused attention and professional recognition. The competition functions as a key platform for constructive feedback, while the presence of a specialised jury underscores the festival's commitment to legitimising and nurturing emerging voices within the cinematic arts. By foregrounding experimentation and innovation, the program encourages young directors to explore new cinematic languages and storytelling techniques, enabling audiences to discover fresh aesthetic and narrative approaches.

Beyond exhibition and recognition, the Green Years competition seeks to cultivate a sense of community among young directors. By connecting filmmakers with their peers, the program creates space for shared experiences, dialogue, and the formation of lasting professional relationships. Such interactions often lead to future collaborations and provide participants with a supportive network as they navigate the complexities of the film industry. In alignment with Doclisboa's broader mission, Green Years also familiarises young filmmakers with the competitive dimensions of the festival circuit, including submission processes, selection criteria, networking dynamics, and market trends.

Overall, the Green Years program stands as a vital initiative that champions experimentation, encourages the emergence of new cinematic perspectives, and actively contributes to the ongoing development and renewal of contemporary cinema.

## DOK LEIPZIG

As the oldest festival within the Doc Alliance Network, DOK Leipzig does not maintain a separate competition exclusively for emerging directors. This decision reflects the festival's firm belief that debut and early works deserve the same critical attention and rigorous evaluation as films by established filmmakers. By refraining from creating a distinct category for young directors, DOK Leipzig affirms its commitment to assessing all films on equal artistic grounds, regardless of the director's career stage. Notably, in 2024, a significant proportion of the films selected for the International Competition Documentary Film were works by emerging filmmakers, demonstrating that inclusivity is embedded in the festival's selection practices.

At the same time, the festival acknowledges new talent through dedicated awards within the International Competition for Documentary Films. These include the Silver Dove for the best feature-length documentary by an up-and-coming director (with up to three directorial works) and a corresponding award for the best short documentary by an emerging filmmaker. In addition, the inclusion of short films alongside feature-length works across competition sections naturally ensures strong representation of early-career directors within the overall program.

Beyond the competition framework, DOK Leipzig maintains year-round engagement with film and art schools, and student productions are actively considered during the selection process. The festival also hosts DOK Industry, its professional networking platform, which organises more than fifty events during the festival and is open to emerging filmmakers. Film students benefit from discounted accreditation, facilitating access to panels, workshops, and networking opportunities. Furthermore, the festival regularly follows up on projects presented within DOK Industry, including those by upcoming directors, thereby extending its support beyond the festival dates.

In sum, DOK Leipzig remains a significant platform for emerging filmmakers. By integrating them into its official competitions rather than isolating them in a separate category, the festival enables new directors to compete on equal footing while simultaneously building relationships with established professionals in the international documentary community.

## FIDMARSEILLE

FIDCampus is an intensive training program for young international filmmakers organised in parallel with the FIDMarseille International Film Festival. Launched in 2013, it brings together ten to fifteen filmmakers each year for a seven-day immersive experience in Marseille during the festival. In collaboration with partner universities, art schools, and French Institutes worldwide, FIDMarseille circulates an open call aimed at filmmakers who have recently completed their studies or are entering the professional field. Applicants are required to submit a recent work—either completed or in post-production—along with a motivation letter.

In recent editions, FIDCampus has received approximately 130 applications per year from a wide range of countries across Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The program is designed to bridge the gap between academic film education and professional filmmaking through a combination of workshops, mentorship, festival attendance, and networking opportunities. By immersing participants in the festival environment, FIDCampus enables them to engage directly with international cinephiles, critics, and industry professionals—encounters that can prove pivotal in shaping their careers. The program's supportive and collaborative atmosphere has established it as a fertile ground for emerging talent, underscoring FIDMarseille's ongoing commitment to fostering new cinematic voices.

Beyond FIDCampus, FIDMarseille features two competitive sections particularly significant for early-career filmmakers: the First Film Competition and the Short Film Competition. The First Film Competition presents debut feature films by both French and international directors, offering them high visibility within a respected international framework. Many filmmakers who premiere their first feature at FIDMarseille subsequently gain broader international recognition.

The Short Film Competition, while open to filmmakers at all career stages, places particular emphasis on emerging directors. This focus is reinforced through collaborations with film schools, which are invited to nominate student works for consideration, thereby strengthening the festival's links with educational institutions and new talent.

Additionally, FIDLab, FIDMarseille's co-production platform established in 2009, selects ten to twelve projects each year at various stages of development. Open to both emerging and established filmmakers, FIDLab creates a dynamic professional environment in which newcomers can connect with experienced industry figures, develop their projects, and initiate future collaborations. Through this interconnected structure of training, competition, and co-production, FIDMarseille positions itself as a key space for the discovery and advancement of new voices in contemporary cinema.

## JI.HLAVA

Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival has long demonstrated a strong commitment to nurturing emerging talent in non-fiction cinema. Recognising the need for a structured platform to support young and aspiring filmmakers, the festival launched Ji.hlava Academy in 2017 as an educational, networking, and creative hub for directors, film students, and future industry professionals.

Ji.hlava Academy offers a four-day creative lab designed for participants seeking to explore innovative visual approaches, refine their authorial voice, and deepen their understanding of contemporary documentary practice.

The program combines masterclasses led by renowned industry professionals with personalised mentoring sessions. Alongside theoretical insights, participants engage in practical exercises, benefiting from close guidance by experienced filmmakers and tutors. In this way, the Academy fosters both artistic development and professional orientation.

The festival further supports emerging directors through the First Lights competition, dedicated to first and second feature-length films presented as world, international, or European premieres. By integrating these works into its official program, Ji.hlava provides early-career filmmakers with significant international visibility.

Student filmmaking also occupies an important place within the festival's structure. Ji.hlava regularly includes student films in two non-competitive sections: Students Present, which showcases works from Czech film schools, and FAMU Presents, highlighting notable documentaries created by first-year students of the Department of Documentary Filmmaking at FAMU. These sections emphasise the festival's close relationship with educational institutions and its role in facilitating early public exposure for young filmmakers.

Support for emerging professionals at Ji.hlava extends beyond directing to film production. The festival's flagship industry initiative, Emerging Producers, presents and promotes a new generation of European producers, offering them networking opportunities and international industry recognition.

Importantly, Ji.hlava's engagement with young talent continues throughout the year. The festival organises masterclasses, workshops, and meetings at film schools and educational institutions internationally, maintaining an ongoing

dialogue with future filmmakers. Through this sustained commitment—and particularly through the comprehensive structure of Ji.hlava Academy—the festival equips young professionals with essential tools, networks, and visibility. In doing so, Ji.hlava not only supports the launch of new careers but also enriches the contemporary cinematic landscape by cultivating innovative voices for the future of documentary film.

## MILLENNIUM DOCS AGAINST GRAVITY

Although Millennium Docs Against Gravity does not feature a program exclusively dedicated to young filmmakers, it nonetheless provides substantial opportunities for emerging talent through its First Appearance Competition and Short Film Competition. These sections play a key role in identifying, showcasing, and supporting new directors, offering them meaningful visibility within an international festival context.

The First Appearance Competition is entirely devoted to debut feature-length documentaries. As such, it functions as a launchpad for filmmakers presenting their first full-length work, granting them an important platform to introduce their artistic voice to international audiences and industry professionals. By focusing specifically on first features, the festival demonstrates a clear commitment to discovering and promoting new cinematic perspectives. The competition not only highlights the creativity of emerging directors but also encourages the exploration of new documentary languages and narrative forms. Participation can significantly contribute to a filmmaker's professional trajectory, providing critical exposure and opening doors to further opportunities within the industry.

The Short Film Competition, while not limited exclusively to debut works, represents another significant entry point for young filmmakers. Dedicated to short-length films, this section offers a valuable space for experimentation and early recognition. A strong presence of emerging directors is ensured through the festival's active engagement with Polish and international film schools, from which programmers seek recommendations and promising works. This close collaboration with educational institutions reinforces the competition's role as a discovery platform, fostering creativity and innovation while bringing the work of young filmmakers to a broader public.

Together, the First Appearance and Short Film Competitions form a central pillar of support for emerging talent at Millennium Docs Against Gravity. Even without a standalone program for young filmmakers, these sections ensure that new voices are visible within the festival's official framework. Moreover, within the MDAG Industry platform, selected projects have the opportunity to participate in online or on-site workshops led by experienced tutors, preparing them for pitching sessions and further development. This professional guidance helps emerging filmmakers refine both their projects and presentation skills, strengthening their chances of attracting interest from producers, distributors, and other key industry stakeholders.

## VISIONS DU RÉEL

Visions du Réel offers dedicated programs and initiatives to support emerging filmmakers, with the Opening Scenes program at the centre of this effort. Opening Scenes is a competition designed to give young directors the opportunity to present their innovative work to an international audience while connecting

with industry professionals. This initiative serves not only as a launching platform for filmmakers' professional careers but also as a space for the public to discover fresh cinematic languages.

The program focuses on first short films and student films, which can be European, international, or world premieres, ensuring the inclusion of new and experimental works. By positioning these films within the festival's official selection, Opening Scenes guarantees that emerging filmmakers receive the same level of attention and critical appreciation as more established directors. Participation allows young filmmakers to present their creative vision to critics, industry professionals, and cinephiles, often generating opportunities for further collaborations and professional development. The presence of these new voices adds energy and originality to the festival's overall lineup, enriching the cinematic experience for audiences and participants alike.

Complementing the competition, the Opening Scenes Lab provides an industry-oriented program of workshops, seminars, and networking events tailored to the needs of directors who have recently completed their studies or are entering the professional field. The Lab bridges the gap between academic training and the practical realities of the industry, offering insights into festival circuits, film distribution, marketing, and other essential aspects of early-career development. Participants benefit from a collaborative environment that fosters mentorship, feedback, and peer-to-peer exchange, helping them build professional networks and explore potential future collaborations.

In summary, Opening Scenes at Visions du Réel offers emerging filmmakers a prestigious platform to present their first short films or student projects to a global audience and key industry figures. Through the Opening Scenes Lab,

the festival ensures that these young directors receive guidance, mentorship, and the knowledge necessary to navigate the early stages of their careers. The festival's ongoing support creates a vibrant community where artistic experimentation, dialogue, and collaboration flourish, underscoring Visions du Réel's role as both a showcase for innovative cinema and a hub for the professional and creative growth of emerging talent.

## DOC ALLIANCE AWARD

All seven festivals of the Doc Alliance network have jointly developed another initiative to support emerging filmmakers: the Doc Alliance Award. The award was established in 2008 and is intended for the first and second features of emerging filmmakers. Since 2021, a separate award has also been given for a short film. Today, each festival within the network nominates one feature and one short film for the award. The prize carries a monetary endowment of €5,000 for Best Feature and €3,000 for Best Short.

Beyond the monetary recognition, the award provides significant visibility for emerging talent. All nominated films are automatically included for distribution on DAfilms, the online platform managed collectively by the Doc Alliance festivals. This enables filmmakers to reach international audiences and promote their debut works effectively. The winning film receives additional attention through a focused marketing campaign: it is featured as DAfilms' "Film of the Week," promoted via newsletters, highlighted on the platform's homepage, and shared across social media channels. This strategic approach maximises audience exposure, ensuring that emerging filmmakers gain both recognition and a broader platform for their creative work.



CPH:DOX has been tasked with analysing how new technologies and VR/XR programming are used in the documentary film field. To establish this, CPH:DOX has conducted several interviews, surveys and done archival and online research, both with external and internal stakeholders who are experts in this field. Considering the fact that this report will be analysing VR and XR practises, a definition of the two should be given:

“Virtual reality (VR) is a fully-immersive digital environment. Extended reality (XR) is an umbrella term that covers all these different technologies, including AR, MR, and VR” — as defined by J. Tremosa in *Beyond AR vs. VR: What is the difference between AR vs. MR vs. VR vs. XR?*

In recent years, we see more and more hybrid artworks adopting live performances and XR technologies such as multiple projects by Matt Romein (<https://matt-romein.com>), an American artist and performer working at the intersection of live performance, generative computer art, and multi-media installation. Furthermore, this technology has revolutionised other industries such as gaming, entertainment, education, healthcare, architecture, and manufacturing.

However, for our purposes we will solely focus on XR and VR technology in the documentary field. Although new technologies and XR programming are no longer novel concepts, their ongoing evolution continues to shape various sectors. Initially driven by large companies, the development of these technologies has now expanded to individual creators, further accelerating innovation. For many partners within Doc Alliance, new technologies and XR programming have already been featured or promoted at various events, demonstrating the increasing relevance and potential of these tools in documentary storytelling.

The purpose of this report is to conduct research amongst the Doc Alliance network and include a deeper understanding of CPH:DOX’s position and strategy in order to generate useful conclusions, best practices and recommendations for the entire Doc Alliance network and beyond.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

- Understanding our audiences and what is appealing to them. What formats/topics of new technologies and XR are attracting? (i.e. domes, AI, performances etc).
- Understanding what is our role, as documentary festivals, in new formats/new media distribution.
- How it can be a way to reach new audiences.



## CPH:DOX

In this section, we will delve into the insights and experiences gained by CPH:DOX and other members of the Doc Alliance regarding emerging technologies and XR activities over the past few years. We will explore the lessons they have learned, the innovations they've embraced, and the challenges they anticipate in the future. Additionally, we will provide a broader, global perspective on new technologies and XR through articles and contributions from various artists. Finally, we will examine the evolving relationship between these technologies and their audiences, as well as the implications for financing in this rapidly changing landscape.

At CPH:DOX, we aim to support and promote documentary film as an art form and as a multifaceted medium that conveys knowledge and inspires reflection and democratic dialogue. CPH:DOX is founded on the belief that a film festival should not only cater to those specifically interested in film. It should be a cultural manifestation that focuses on the most important questions and issues of our time – from the individually existential to the structurally global. We believe that documentary films can broaden our horizons and reduce the distance between us. In recent years, we have embraced Virtual Reality (VR) and Extended Reality (XR) technologies, incorporating them into our programming to explore new dimensions of documentary filmmaking. We can claim that we were one of the first festivals to embrace and programme content of various types and formats in our public and industry programme.

Below is a small overview of how we incorporate XR/VR technologies in our programme and industry:

### **INTER:ACTIVE EXHIBITION**

The Inter:Active exhibition is an ongoing exploration of creativity and technology. Each year we examine a different aspect of the impact of emerging tech on arts and society through a carefully curated selection of recent immersive and interactive work, created in a variety of media.

Over the past few years we have been particularly interested in presenting work from members of marginalized communities – indigenous, young, differently-abled, neurodiverse, queer, from the global majority, or otherwise excluded or disaffected – those having to continually reappraise the world and society, question the norms and imagine other ways of being, and also those most impacted by technological change.

The exhibition is a key part of the festival that highlights interactive and immersive documentaries, including those utilising VR and XR technologies. This section showcases works that allow audiences to engage with documentary content in new, non-linear ways, offering a more participatory form of storytelling. The exhibition often features VR films, 360-degree videos, interactive installations and AR projects that provide viewers with immersive experiences, allowing them to explore documentary subjects in a more personal and direct manner.

### **CPH:LAB**

CPH:LAB is CPH:DOX's talent development programme that encourages creative risk taking, celebrates raw talent, facilitates collaboration across borders and business sectors and supports visionaries to push the existing boundaries of documentary filmmaking.

Since 2009 the CPH:LAB has established itself as a highly acknowledged, ambitious and yet playful laboratory-style talent scheme showing great results. The lab is conceived as an incubator for documentary projects that seek to explore the potential of digital interactive technologies and advance new visions of what a documentary can be in a digital age. It offers a space for experimentation and collaboration in creative, cross-disciplinary partnerships across film, the creative arts, science, technology and social entrepreneurship.

Since its conception, CPH:LAB has selected and welcomed on average 9 projects each year from different corners of the world that deal with various thematics and focus on different aspects of the world we live in. Many of these projects have been developed at CPH:LAB, then premiered in international festivals such as at Sundance Film Festival (Breathe and Prison X), London Film Festival (Captured) and at IDFA (nerd\_funk and Non-Aligned Newsreels). Non-Aligned Newsreels has been selected for Berlin Biennial 2022 and Oceanic Feeling was part of the ULTRAMARIN – an Immersive Exhibition of VRHAM! and at the Venice Film Festival.

The feedback of the different editions of CPH:LAB is overwhelmingly positive with the vast majority of participants reporting that the programme was very relevant and a good opportunity to enlarge their network of contacts as well as improve their own professional skills and competences and acquire new ones.

## INTER:ACTIVE SYMPOSIUM

With the annual INTER:ACTIVE SYMPOSIUM we bring together key stakeholders of the international film industry and progressive practitioners of new forms of storytelling to discuss the opportunities of emerging media and the future cultural landscape.

The half day INTER:ACTIVE Symposium benefits from a natural synergy with CPH:LAB, as the projects developed in our training programme will be used as the key examples in the debate about the business aspects of how to produce, finance and distribute this kind of audiovisual projects.

We seek to raise awareness and spark conversations with the key industry representatives therefore, we host workshops, panels, and discussions focused on the role of VR and XR in documentary filmmaking in the frame of INTER:ACTIVE Symposium. These sessions provide filmmakers, producers, and audiences with insights into the creative and technical aspects of producing VR/XR documentaries.

Discussions often include the challenges and opportunities presented by these technologies, such as narrative design in immersive environments, ethical considerations, and the future of documentary storytelling in VR/XR.

## AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

CPH:DOX had an increased focus on making VR/XR content accessible to a wider audience by providing the necessary equipment and creating user-friendly environments where both seasoned VR users and newcomers can

engage with the technology in a meaningful way. Since the early years of XR programming, CPH:DOX has brought forthcoming, interesting and audience intriguing artworks and it was one of the first to programme and create a VR Cinema section at its headquarters, at Kunsthal Charlottenborg, open for free to the public. Since then many editions have passed and CPH:DOX's engagement and commitment to promote XR non-fiction artworks is only getting more loyal while the awareness and audience engagement is getting stronger and stronger.

## COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Every year we seek to partner with international organisations, tech companies, and cultural institutions to expand its VR/XR programming. These collaborations help bring cutting-edge content to the festival and position it as a leader in the exploration of new documentary formats. We collaborate with Sunny Side of the Doc where they showcase annually one of the CPH:LAB projects as a case study in a panel discussion as well as with New Images Festival – one of the leading XR markets, where they pick one LAB project annually to join their XR market activities.

It is worth mentioning that at CPH:DOX 2024, the Eurimages Award for Innovation that comes with 20.000€, was awarded to one of the CPH:LAB projects – Garden Alchemy by Michelle & Uri Kranot. This was a strong message that the new media and XR projects are recognised for their innovative approach and rewarded by the official EU structures.

## CPH:DOX INTERVIEWS

The key takeaways from the interviews we conducted with the CPH:DOX teams are summarised in the following section.

The INTERACTIVE exhibition started in 2017 as part of the first ‘spring edition’ which also happened to be the first edition at Kunsthal Charlottenborg as the new festival centre – a ‘natural home’ for an exhibition like this. In the first years, it was primarily focused on VR as a medium, and this included for example, a VR cinema with 30 seats where people could watch VR films at the same time. In the last couple of years (after Covid), the VR cinema was stopped and the focus shifted more to big and immersive installations instead. The reason for that was that the festival believes that these immersive works are really artistic experiences that inspire the rethinking and reimagining of the documentary genre. The same year, CPH:LAB started focusing on immersive and interactive media as well.

The vision of CPH:DOX is to explore and expand on the notion of what documentary is and can be, which involves exploring the different possible formats. Here, interactive and immersive formats are of high interest, as they have the potential of changing the relational triangle of reality, medium and audience.

The curatorial approach of CPH:DOX as a whole is to engage audiences in debate about social issues and approach this by programming work made primarily by marginalized artists who have a unique worldview and are driven by a need to express themselves. This can include work by artists who are also activists, feminists, neurodiverse, LGBT+ or from the Global Majority. These are most often younger voices as well: digital natives using tools such as game engines

and AI – that come quite naturally to them – to address an audience that has also grown up using them.

Artistic quality, innovative nature and social relevance of the exhibited works as well as audience numbers and feedback are key success criteria for the curatorial team, but what is also key is to get more partners on board and seek new communication channels specifically for the INTER:ACTIVE programme of the festival.

Over the past few years, the Experience Economy has been growing, as young people in particular seek out experiences over buying things. Recently, this has morphed into the Transformation Economy, where audiences are seeking more rewarding, transformational experiences. The community of engaged immersive and interactive artists that we work with are the best placed to create the more intentional, immersive experiences that young audiences are seeking.

The festival team is still wondering whether film festivals are the right or the best venue for these kinds of productions to be shown – due to their financing structure they do not have such clear distribution outlets as a normal documentary film has. Undoubtedly, the distribution channels for these types of projects are challenging but the festival seeks to raise awareness of their existence and present them as an interesting new way of relating to the world. However, festivals should not be the only distribution channel for these works since it would be too limiting. For this reason, CPH:DOX is continually looking for ways to place these projects in the whole ecosystem of the festival. Who is actually funding these projects? And how? Would we be able to draw them to the festival in the right way to make a difference? These questions shape the programme selection and the discussion of each festival edition.

## DOC ALLIANCE MEMBERS AND THEIR XR ACTIVITIES

For a better review of the Doc Alliance XR landscape, we took the time to map the XR activities of the DA member festivals that engage with this medium:

### DOK LEIPZIG

DOK Neuland: Every year during their festival, DOK Leipzig invites the audience to be part of the stories through a virtual space during the DOK Neuland exhibition. Since 2015, DOK Neuland has provided an exhibition platform for the art of interactive and immersive works. There, the audience can discover 10 international pieces (VR, AR, 360°, interactive screenings, games).

By taking advantage of the possibilities presented by new media, selected artists break with familiar story lines, expand the boundaries of our reality and, together with visitors, explore the interaction between humans and machines to create new realms of experience. The selected XR works address war, coloniality, and repression as well as patriarchal and heteronormative powers in rigid systems that legitimise themselves. The exhibition invites the guests to find playful and intuitive approaches to others and to form a collective identity based on shared thoughts and ideas.

### FIDMARSEILLE

FIDLab: FIDLab is a workspace dedicated to selected film projects in response to an international call for entries. Each year, about a dozen projects, regardless of format, duration, or subject matter, including fiction,

documentary, animation, or series, at various stages of writing, development, or post-production, are chosen. The platform was created to provide project creators with dynamic encounters with producers, funding bodies, broadcasters, distributors, sales agents, and TV networks. The FIDLab positions itself as both a talent incubator and a platform promoting diversity, and has gained recognition as a respected label worldwide.

Although FIDLab does not have any dedicated VR or XR programs, the festival organises immersive exhibitions at the SOMA hybrid art space in Marseille during each edition such as the Laure Prouvost exhibition in 2023 and Some Strings exhibition in 2024.

### JI.HLAVA

Virtual Reality: Virtual Reality competition gives viewers the chance to enter into 360° films and spatial installations. The competition usually includes ten projects, of which three to four are installations. Here, the audience can find 360° documentary films, XR, AR, and VR installations and works on the boundary between film and art that make use of virtual spaces to create autonomous worlds whose own rules are determined by visuality.

The festival is interested in works that take advantage of the characteristics of virtuality in an innovative and contemplative manner, that experiment with the audiovisual representation of reality and real stories, or that build an entertaining and instructive world of knowledge and learning. Central to the festival is an emphasis on hybridity, documentary VR-based storytelling or fictional narratives with documentary elements — exploring the lines between the two in the specific space dedicated to VR, XR and AR.

Game Zone: Serious games, simulations, adventure games, RPG, and interactive documentaries – they explore the ways different genres highlight serious topics. For instance, life in a totalitarian society, the construction of a sustainable environment, or the sources of fake news.

### **MILLENNIUM DOCS AGAINST GRAVITY**

Reality Check: Looking at the burning issues of today – mental health, climate change, racism, colonialism and dialogue with tradition – they present a collection of award-winning VR experiences by both Polish and foreign creators. Many of them are presented in Poland for the first time and the admission is free of charge.

## **DOC ALLIANCE MEMBERS INTERVIEWS**

Doc Alliance members that scout projects typically have around six to ten XR/VR projects in each edition of the festival. Most members define success primarily in terms of audience engagement. As Millennium Docs Against Gravity put it: “We would define it in terms of how many people attended and what their feedback on the experiences would be.” DOK Leipzig similarly emphasised audience engagement, adding that they are “working on helping artists expand and contextualise the works to add an art-in-context layer.”

With the exception of CPH:DOX, all Doc Alliance members offer their VR/XR interactive activities free of charge. CPH:DOX introduced an entry fee in its last two editions in order to sustain production and ensure the availability of relevant resources. When it comes to selecting projects, VR/XR content is chosen primarily

on the basis of quality and uniqueness. DOK Leipzig bases its decisions on “the vision, originality, and execution of the piece,” while also thinking about an overall curated program and how pieces relate to each other, placing less emphasis on premieres. Millennium Docs Against Gravity similarly stated that the: “most important criteria is quality. We look for works that we find that are most moving and can enhance your festival experience. Secondly, we try to tie in the XR/VR experiences with films in the cinema programme, or sections. So that if you experience something which touches upon a certain topic you can explore it more in the cinema.”

On the question of artist fees, only one Doc Alliance member currently provides them, though two others have indicated they are working towards doing so. CPH:DOX is the festival that both provides artist fees and covers installation costs.

Regarding their broader mission and values, the festivals reflect different approaches to XR/VR programming. DOK Leipzig describes itself as “art-first,” focused on “playing with the medium and pushing it forward” while also prioritising accessibility and bringing “new and surprising visitors to immersive experiences.” Millennium Docs Against Gravity views VR/XR as “a tool of enhancing the experience of the festival as a whole,” treating it as a complement to the main cinema programme and a means of deepening audience empathy, believing that “the levels of empathy towards certain topics and protagonists can be improved in the way that audiences experience documentary cinema.” Visions du Réel, meanwhile, finds itself in a another position: with Switzerland’s largest VR/XR programme and market located nearby at GIFF in Geneva, the organisation has consciously chosen not to develop its own VR/XR strand, both out of respect for not wanting to cross into “their territory,” and due to the “considerable developments in resources and infrastructure” such a programme would require, the second of which is in short supply in Nyon.

## CREATIVE MEDIA AND XR ACTIVITIES

As an organisation that is supported by public funding at national and international level, we believe that we can't have a conversation of the XR programming in our festival and the member festivals without reviewing the available funds at EU level on the various funding calls and strands. A few words are given for each one we found available at the moment knowing the dynamic nature of this kind of calls and funding opportunities.

Creative Europe Media and Art Strand and the Horizon Europe programs are two of the European Union's flagship initiatives for supporting media, arts, and technological innovation, including extended reality and games. Both programs are highly relevant for creative industries, digital technologies, and new media.

## CREATIVE EUROPE - MEDIA STRAND

The MEDIA strand of the Creative Europe program supports the European audiovisual industry. It focuses on film, television, video games, and other media content, aiming to promote Europe's cultural diversity, digital transformation, and international competitiveness.

Key Areas of Support:

- Video Game Development: Media supports the development of video games and interactive digital storytelling, including XR, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR). The goal is to develop original narratives that appeal to European and international audiences.
- Audience Development: There's a strong emphasis on creating high-quality content that appeals to diverse European audiences and beyond. The initiative also focuses on broadening the reach of European content, including VR/XR projects, by increasing cross-border circulation and access to digital platforms.
- Training and Education: Creative Europe MEDIA also funds capacity-building initiatives, training programs, and networking activities to enhance the skill set of European creators and developers in new technologies like XR and games.

## HORIZON EUROPE – NEW MEDIA AND XR (IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES)

Horizon Europe is the EU’s primary funding program for research and innovation, with a strong focus on cutting-edge technologies, including new media and XR. The program targets a range of industries, including gaming and immersive experiences, and promotes projects that aim to transform how media is produced, distributed, and consumed.

### Key Focus Areas:

- XR and Immersive Technologies: Horizon Europe promotes the development of advanced XR technologies (VR/AR/MR) for various sectors, including education, healthcare, creative industries, and gaming. The goal is to leverage XR for innovative applications and transformative experiences.
- AI and Data in Media: The integration of AI, big data, and machine learning to enhance interactive experiences and optimize content delivery is a priority. XR and games that utilise these technologies to create personalised, data-driven experiences are highly relevant for Horizon funding.
- Cross-Disciplinary Innovation: Horizon Europe encourages projects that merge disciplines such as digital art, interactive media, technology, and cultural studies. XR projects that fuse gaming with fields like education, tourism, or health often find more support.

## AUDIENCE INTEREST AND TRENDS IN XR/GAMES FUNDING

Both Creative Europe and Horizon Europe stress the importance of understanding and engaging the audience:

- Rising Demand for Immersive Experiences: There is growing audience demand for immersive experiences, particularly in sectors like gaming, cultural heritage, education, and tourism. Both funding programs are interested in projects that leverage XR to create new forms of audience interaction.
- Cultural Identity and European Stories: Both programs value projects that reflect European cultural heritage and stories. There is a specific interest in XR games and immersive content that bring European culture, languages, and narratives to new platforms, helping foster a sense of shared identity among audiences.
- Cross-Platform Distribution: Reaching audiences on multiple platforms (mobile, console, PC, VR headsets) is key to securing funding. Creative Europe and Horizon Europe support projects that integrate cross-platform strategies and innovative distribution methods.

Creative Europe MEDIA focuses more on content production and audience engagement, including fostering cultural diversity and transnational collaboration. Horizon Europe, on the other hand, targets technological innovation in XR and games, supporting projects that push the boundaries of immersive tech and aim for long-term societal and economic impact. Both programs see the value of XR and gaming as tools for storytelling, education, and cultural preservation and emphasise collaboration, audience impact, and technological advancement in their funding criteria.

## CONCLUSIONS

### PROGRAMMING

Regarding the programming of XR artworks they can only be considered in line with the global audiovisual landscape. Immersive pieces of work are considered the empathy machines, their selection and curation at a film festival plays a similar role to the classic-format films and documentaries that raise awareness, questions and spark discussions about the world we live in.

Undoubtedly, the distribution of these kinds of works is still more challenging compared to the classic format therefore the role of a festival is to enable communication, networking and the facilitation of the distribution. Very often festivals serve as the premiere point for these works but it should not be the only distribution strategy plan in place. Festivals and their programming play a very important role that needs to be carefully considered but not limit the works in terms of their lifecycle and exposure.

Other key challenges are to be considered when curating an XR section, encompassing larger scale preoccupations of the festival. One of which could be the environmental impact of such technologies and how they can become more eco-responsible. With more festivals trying to act on their green policies and become eco-certified, adding more technologies to the programming is unlikely to lower the carbon footprint of the festival. However, there are many efforts and action plans in the industry that are being led to help these kinds of exhibitions and public presentations to become more environmentally responsible. While it is still a tremendous task to calculate the environmental impact of every single piece, it is important to keep in mind the intrinsic

ecological challenges coming with XR programming and at large, the overall activities of a film festival.

### AUDIENCE

Although the festivals' audience is exposed more and more to immersive works and productions of different kinds, the programming should always keep in mind and question the level of knowledge of the audience in order for the curation and presentation of the pieces to be appropriate and accessible. For sure this derives from the question: For who do we make our curation for? The general audience or the people from industry?

The immersive experience is a big thing for events and festivals in the last few years. It has evolved and enhanced how people are now accessing new information, getting new experiences, and connecting. Extended reality has played a significant role in this enormous shift of change in people's preferences and helped in "relocating" their time and space to eradicate the concept of "distance" in the digital age. XR programming is able to give the audience a novel experience by introducing a new digital element and blending it with reality offering a holistic "front-row" event experience for every audience member. Furthermore it generates Audience engagement, through generating a fair amount of buzz around a film festival with the promotion of futuristic technology boosts the audience's experience and creates a social rumble. And lastly it has the potential to enhance creativity by presenting artworks in a more personal and exciting way for each audience member.

However, as festival organisers we must be aware of how to use XR technology to our advantage correctly. We believe that we must stay away

from the common and not-so-common misuse of this technology, helping to conduct the best version of our events focusing on the following. Using XR technologies can lead to Device Fatigue, headsets can be an excellent tool for the audience but can tire the eyes and the brain if not used correctly. Hence, we must make sure that the audience can get the whole experience in short snippets, which allows them to rest their senses and adapt to the new way of experiencing events. Besides, it can reduce Social Interaction by overusing XR and potentially reduce the audience's social interaction. Organisers must ensure that the events using XR technology are made interactive and shareable so that the audience can engage or partake in activities together. Furthermore, XR technology is costly in equipment and personnel, XR devices and experts can be expensive. This is often seen as a downside. However, it is not different to investing in massive stages, renting out stadiums or auditoriums, and stage production. Lastly it's a Niche Technology, although Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality have been there for a few years, they are yet to become mainstream and witness wider adoption. They are currently being deployed in a very selective way, at least for now.

## PRODUCTION

When it comes to the programming and showing of XR pieces the needs in terms of production, staffing, equipment and knowledge are special and more demanding compared to the classic-format films. Therefore the need for training of the staff as well as developing new and different kinds of partnerships with companies, organisations and funds are very important. Furthermore, the financing of this kind of festival production is more costly compared to the regular one especially given the fact that it is for a short period of time during the festival life. The challenge remains on how to extend and

expand the exhibition space and time in order to capitalise more on the overall effort. Considering how scalable these works are and how profitable they can make their programming by answering the question: How many people can experience them at the same time? Are they free or ticketed, and how do you deal with the accredited guests and their participation, will they pay extra or will their access be included?

## CONCLUSION

The integration of XR technologies into documentary film festivals presents a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities. While offering immersive storytelling potential, its adoption necessitates careful consideration of various factors. High production costs, requiring significant investment in technology and skilled personnel, pose a major barrier for festivals with limited budgets. This is compounded by the need for specialised technical expertise in areas like 3D modelling, animation, sound design, and VR/AR development, as it is often exceeding the in-house capabilities of many festivals.

Accessibility and inclusivity are paramount. Festivals must ensure that VR/XR experiences cater both to diverse audiences, including those with disabilities and varying levels of digital literacy and make sure that the audience's Device Fatigue stays in healthy shape. This mandates user-friendly interfaces and the provision of necessary equipment. While immersive technologies promise impactful experiences, audience engagement is not solely reliant on the technology itself. Narrative quality, emotional impact, and the overall effectiveness of the storytelling remain crucial for meaningful interaction. Furthermore, something we haven't touched upon too much is that the distribution and preservation of XR content introduce distinct challenges.

Such as, formats. These must be standardised for accessibility, and long-term digital archiving strategies are crucial. Besides, ethical considerations are also critical, data privacy, user consent, and the potential for biased or manipulative representation must be addressed through comprehensive guidelines and responsible development practices.

Despite these obstacles, XR technology offers significant opportunities. Immersive storytelling capabilities allow for active audience participation, transforming viewers into active participants within the narrative rather than passive observers. This fosters enhanced emotional connections with documentary subjects, creating more profound and memorable experiences. XR technologies foster cross-disciplinary collaboration, bringing together filmmakers, technologists, and artists in a creative bubble that promotes innovation. Finally, innovative funding models must be explored, utilising a mix of traditional methods alongside private sponsorships, grants from specialised organisations, and crowdfunding to support these endeavours.

In conclusion, the challenges and opportunities inherent in XR programming demand a strategic approach. Careful planning, investment in technical expertise, a focus on inclusive design and audience engagement, besides there should be a clear commitment to ethical practices as they are vital for a successful integration. Successful festivals will benefit their existence and networks if they have the ability to carefully incorporate immersive technologies within their programming.

Julia Duarte for Doclisboa on  
**INCLUSION, DIVERSITY AND  
REPRESENTATIVENESS**



The broader report was developed in two phases. The first consisted of internal questionnaires and conversations that helped us determine each festival's position on inclusive programming and inclusivity overall. In the second phase, these findings were complemented by research focusing on official festival websites, related online resources, and relevant articles.

## CPH:DOX

CPH:DOX, one of the world's leading documentary film festivals, has taken significant steps not only in curating films but also in implementing initiatives that reinforce its commitment to gender parity, diversity, and inclusion. Beyond its programming, these efforts reflect a holistic approach to fostering a more accessible and equitable environment for both filmmakers and audiences. Through its 50/50×2020 pledge, emphasis on inclusive venues, and diverse thematic programming, CPH:DOX exemplifies the evolving role of film festivals as agents of cultural change.

A key initiative is its commitment to the 50/50×2020 pledge, a global movement aimed at achieving gender parity in film festivals by 2020. By signing this pledge, CPH:DOX committed to equal representation of female and male filmmakers across its programme. This step acknowledges the historical gender imbalance that has long characterized the film industry, particularly within documentary filmmaking. The pledge aligns with the festival's broader mission to foster equity and diversity within its ecosystem. By promoting gender balance not only on screen but also behind the camera, the festival influences decisions related to directors, jury composition, and overall operations, challenging entrenched industry norms and contributing to long-term change.

Currently, CPH:DOX demonstrates strong gender representation in its leadership and selection structures. With a female Managing Director and a board composed of four women and one man, the festival reflects gender equity at the highest organizational level. Additionally, its selection committee is evenly balanced, with four women and four men, ensuring that the evaluation process incorporates diverse perspectives.

In recent years, the festival has also made measurable progress within its competition programme. While a perfect 50/50 split has not yet been achieved, the 2022 figures are notable: 47% of films were directed by women, 50% by men, and 3% were co-directed by mixed-gender teams. Although incremental, these figures represent meaningful progress in an industry historically dominated by men.

Importantly, CPH:DOX extends its commitment to inclusion beyond gender parity. The festival prioritizes accessible venues, ensuring that audiences—regardless of physical ability—can fully participate. By selecting locations equipped to accommodate individuals with disabilities, it actively reduces barriers and broadens access to its programming.

With the 2024 theme “Body Politics,” the festival places even greater emphasis on creating a more accessible, democratic, and inclusive cinematic experience. Through innovative approaches ranging from architectural design to VR immersion, CPH:DOX underscores the importance of enabling all audiences to engage fully with its offerings. A key example is the new cinema at the Kunsthall Charlottenborg festival center, designed with accessibility at its core. The venue includes telecoil loops, varied seating options, and enhanced acoustic control, offering an improved experience for audiences with disabilities. Telecoil technology enables individuals with hearing aids to receive clearer sound, reflecting the festival’s attentiveness to diverse audience needs. Likewise, flexible seating arrangements and acoustic considerations ensure comfort for individuals with different mobility levels and sensory sensitivities.

In addition, CPH:DOX is widely recognized for its focus on diverse themes, regularly showcasing films that foreground underrepresented perspectives

and marginalized communities. Its carefully curated thematic sections create space for intercultural dialogue and invite audiences to engage with pressing global and social issues through documentary storytelling.

One of the most compelling examples of this commitment is the “Unbounded Bodies” section of the INTER:ACTIVE Exhibition 2024, which presents a collection of immersive and interactive artworks. These works explore themes such as disability, bodily functions, gender, and desire, creating space for narratives that are often overlooked or marginalized. The section invites audiences to challenge conventional notions of identity and to engage with the diverse and sometimes transgressive ways in which individuals inhabit their bodies. By addressing the intersections of physical, emotional, and sexual identity, the festival highlights the importance of representing experiences that fall outside dominant norms.

The introduction of the PARA:FICTIONS section further demonstrates CPH:DOX’s innovative approach to diversity, not only in content but also in form. By blending documentary and fiction, this section challenges traditional genre boundaries and encourages audiences to reconsider distinctions between reality and storytelling. In doing so, the festival expands the scope of documentary practice and reinforces its commitment to presenting complex, multifaceted human experiences.

CPH:DOX also recognizes the importance of ensuring that its programming, curation processes, and decision-making structures reflect a wide range of backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experiences. It has therefore made deliberate efforts to embed representativeness at every level of its organization—from outreach and curation to staffing and event production.

The question of whether a committee composed of diverse backgrounds is necessary is not only relevant but central to the festival’s mission of inclusivity and equal representation. By involving individuals from different regions, communities, identities, and even disciplines beyond cinema, the festival avoids operating within a cultural “echo chamber” and instead draws on a plurality of perspectives. Including voices from fields such as science, literature, and education—alongside film professionals—ensures that the selected works reflect a broader spectrum of insights. This approach ultimately contributes to a richer, more inclusive programme that authentically represents diverse global experiences.

CPH:DOX further emphasizes the role of young and emerging voices through its co-curator initiative, introduced in 2020. By engaging a diverse group of co-curators aged 16–25, the festival not only reinforces its commitment to inclusivity but also creates meaningful entry points for younger generations into the professional film landscape. This initiative reflects a long-term vision for sustainable representation, ensuring that future storytellers and cultural contributors are actively involved in shaping narratives and curatorial decisions.

Through these initiatives, CPH:DOX seeks not only to reflect the world as it is, but also to help shape a more just and inclusive one. Its approach to gender equality, accessibility, and thematic diversity is not peripheral but central to its identity. By embedding these values into its structure, the festival sends a clear message: representation matters, and every story deserves a platform.

## DOCLISBOA

Doclisboa International Documentary Film Festival has consistently positioned itself as a leader in inclusivity, demonstrating a sustained commitment to gender balance across its programming. By ensuring equitable representation within its competitions and embedding diversity and plurality into its core principles, the festival affirms the importance of gender equity within the filmmaking industry.

Data from 2024 clearly illustrates this commitment: the International Competition achieved a 50% gender split, with six films directed by women and six by men. The inclusion of an agender filmmaker further reflects a broader and more nuanced understanding of gender identity. Doclisboa’s selection process is guided by the aim of representing a wide array of voices and experiences. Its programme features both established and emerging filmmakers, particularly from regions traditionally underrepresented in global cinema, including Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. By foregrounding stories shaped by diverse racial, gendered, sexual, socioeconomic, and cultural identities, the festival creates a cinematic space that extends inclusivity beyond geography to encompass lived experience.

Beyond programming, Doclisboa reinforces its commitment through targeted initiatives. The Joaquim Jordà Residencies—named after the filmmaker Joaquim Jordà—support the development of non-fiction projects that challenge conventional forms and amplify underrepresented narratives. By funding these projects and facilitating international networks for dialogue and collaboration, the residencies underscore the festival’s broader ideological commitment to diversity in storytelling. Similarly, Nebulae, a networking platform, fosters collaboration among filmmakers, producers, and industry professionals through curated one-on-one meetings, promoting inclusive co-production opportunities.

Arché, a development and mentorship programme focused on Ibero-American filmmakers and organized in partnership with the Márgenes Festival, provides annual support to projects rooted in Ibero-American contexts. In addition, collaboration with UnionDocs – Center for Documentary Art creates space for experimentation through seminars dedicated to innovative documentary practices and cinematic language. Through intensive workshops, the festival offers artists opportunities to engage with new forms and radical approaches to storytelling.

Doclisboa also extends its reach internationally through its Macau edition, strengthening cultural exchange between Portugal and Macau by showcasing Portuguese, international, and local productions. This initiative highlights the festival's broader mission of fostering cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. Moreover, this initiative emphasizes the festival's role in celebrating the historical and cultural ties between Macau and Portugal while fostering the visibility of underrepresented voices in documentary cinema.

Alongside its commitment to diversity and inclusion, Doclisboa has also prioritized environmental sustainability. Through various partnerships, the festival has implemented initiatives aimed at reducing its ecological footprint. For example, electric vehicles have been used for guest transportation, while collaborations with environmental organizations help offset emissions generated by travel. The festival also promotes circular practices by repurposing advertising materials into reusable products. Additional initiatives include transforming organic waste into award trophies and partnering with local organizations to prevent food waste by redistributing surplus produce. These efforts reflect a comprehensive approach to sustainability that aligns with the festival's broader social values.

In conclusion, the wide range of initiatives undertaken by Doclisboa demonstrates its ongoing commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and the advancement of documentary cinema as both an artistic practice and a tool for social engagement. Through programs such as the Joaquim Jordà Residencies and its international collaborations, the festival continues to reinforce its position as a significant force within the global documentary landscape.

## DOK LEIPZIG

DOK Leipzig Film Festival has taken meaningful and proactive steps to promote gender balance in its programming, reflecting a broader commitment to diversity and inclusion. This commitment became particularly visible in 2018 with the introduction of a 40/60 quota for female directors in the German Competition for Long Documentary and Animated Film—a measure that has since become central to the festival's objectives. By striving for a more balanced gender ratio in its film selection, DOK Leipzig has set a positive precedent within the festival circuit, challenging the long-standing male dominance in documentary filmmaking.

In the same year, the festival also ensured that its Selection Committee reflected this commitment to gender balance. With a predominantly female composition—four women and three men—the committee was tasked with evaluating a pool of anonymized submissions during the initial round of screenings. This anonymization process ensures that decisions are based solely on the merit of the work, thereby reducing the potential for gender bias.

Support for female filmmakers extends well beyond competition structures. The DOK Co-Pro Market serves as a key platform for filmmakers in the development stages of their documentary projects. Through this initiative, the festival supports awards specifically aimed at female filmmakers and provides a travel grant for a selected female director or producer. These measures enable women to develop their projects and expand their professional networks, addressing structural and socioeconomic barriers that often limit their opportunities in the industry. Furthermore, DOK Leipzig's collaboration with the European Women's Audiovisual Network (EWA) strengthens its institutional commitment to gender equality by offering additional resources and support through initiatives such as the EWA Development Prize.

Accessibility is another central pillar of DOK Leipzig's inclusive approach. The festival implements a range of measures to ensure that individuals with diverse needs can experience and engage with its programming. Selected screenings include audio description and SDH (subtitles for the Deaf and hard of hearing), while certain masterclasses and discussions offer sign language interpretation. These efforts go beyond facilitating passive access, enabling audiences to actively participate in conversations and events. In this way, the festival emphasizes that inclusion is not only about access, but also about meaningful engagement.

DOK Leipzig also leverages digital technology to expand its inclusive reach. Its website and mobile application are designed with accessibility features that allow users to interact with content in ways suited to their needs. Inclusion further extends to environmental awareness: by programming films that address climate change and its social consequences, the festival amplifies voices and communities disproportionately affected by ecological crises.

Through its DOK Industry programme—including initiatives such as DOK Talks and the DOK Industry Podcast—the festival actively engages with questions of representation and structural inequality within the film industry. These platforms encourage critical reflection on how films are produced, distributed, and received. Discussions often highlight how filmmakers from disadvantaged social, economic, or political contexts can experience marginalization within a predominantly Western-dominated industry, resulting in their stories remaining underrepresented. DOK Leipzig responds to these imbalances by creating spaces that foreground such perspectives and provide greater visibility.

In addition, the festival collaborates with initiatives such as FLINTA, which supports filmmakers who identify as female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans, or agender. This partnership demonstrates that DOK Leipzig moves beyond passive inclusivity toward active engagement with diverse communities. It reflects a broader commitment to fostering an industry environment in which a wider range of voices can be heard and supported.

Beyond advocacy for representation, DOK Leipzig encourages critical engagement with the structures that shape cinematic production and distribution. The DOK Industry Podcast, for instance, features in-depth discussions that challenge dominant industry narratives and emphasize the responsibility of cinema to represent diverse realities. These conversations often underscore the need to resist market-driven pressures that can marginalize less commercially viable but socially significant stories.

DOK Leipzig is also at the forefront of sustainability initiatives, ensuring that its operations reflect not only artistic ambition but also ecological responsibility. The festival has implemented measures to reduce its environmental footprint, including waste reduction, energy conservation, and sustainable mobility practices. At the same time, it encourages environmentally conscious behavior within its wider community. By aligning its operational practices with its programming, DOK Leipzig reinforces its commitment to supporting filmmakers who address environmental and sustainability issues.

Ultimately, DOK Leipzig functions as more than a screening platform; it operates as a dynamic space for the continued evolution of documentary film in pursuit of artistic innovation and social change. Its sustained efforts toward gender equity, inclusive representation, and environmental sustainability reflect core values of human dignity, diversity, and social responsibility.

## FIDMARSEILLE

FIDMarseille is more than a film festival; it functions as a dynamic forum where diverse voices and forms of reality-based cinema—both documentary and fiction—converge. Through critical essays, daily bilingual journals, and panel discussions, the festival fosters sustained public dialogue. Internationally recognized for its artistic coherence and rigorous programming, FIDMarseille attracts professionals and journalists from around the world.

With 2,807 submitted films, including 1,050 first features, the festival's landscape reflects a shift toward greater inclusivity. However, while progress is evident, the data also highlights the ongoing challenges of achieving true

gender parity. Statistics from 2024 indicate that 53% of submitted films were directed by men, 43% by women, and 4% by agender filmmakers. This distribution demonstrates a conscious effort to increase visibility for historically underrepresented groups within the film industry.

At the same time, disparities persist within the final selection, largely reflecting male dominance at the submission stage—a pattern indicative of broader structural inequalities within the industry. In response, FIDMarseille actively works to amplify women directors and underrepresented filmmakers through its non-competitive sections and curated strands, thereby mitigating some of these imbalances.

The inclusion of 42 world premieres, five international premieres, and three French premieres further underscores the festival's role as a platform for new and emerging voices. By offering visibility to films that may struggle to enter mainstream circuits, FIDMarseille contributes to reshaping whose stories are seen and circulated, particularly in relation to gender and global representation.

The festival's commitment to diversity extends beyond programming into broader social engagement. A key initiative involves the development of educational programs aimed at fostering critical thinking among young audiences, particularly within schools and student communities. Through these efforts, the festival promotes cultural literacy and encourages deeper engagement with the cinematic works it presents.

An especially significant aspect of FIDMarseille's inclusivity agenda is its involvement in rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives. The festival participates in projects designed to support former detainees in their

reintegration into society and the labor market, demonstrating a commitment to diversity that extends beyond cultural representation into the social sphere.

One of the most notable outreach initiatives is the Vis-à-vis Workshop at the Baumettes Penitentiary Centre, organized in collaboration with Lieux Fictifs, Aix-Marseille University, and the École des Beaux-Arts de Marseille. These workshops, built around films from the festival’s catalogue, create a dialogic space within the prison environment, encouraging reflection, exchange, and cultural connection. By bridging institutional and social divides, the programme positions cinema as a tool for education, expression, and reintegration. Furthermore, the festival enables detained participants to engage directly with filmmakers and contribute to jury processes, thereby integrating marginalized voices into broader cultural discourse.

In parallel, FIDMarseille collaborates with local social organizations to engage with marginalized communities across the city. Partnerships with groups such as Addap13, AAJT, Cultures du Cœur, and CIERES enable the festival to reach individuals from underprivileged or excluded backgrounds, including at-risk youth, economically disadvantaged communities, migrants, and minorities. These collaborations bring cultural participation to audiences who may otherwise lack access to such experiences.

Since 2023, FIDMarseille has partnered with L’Atelier des artistes en exil, a Marseille-based branch of the Agency of Artists in Exile, to foreground the voices of filmmakers in exile from countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Syria, Iran, and Colombia. Each year, these artists form a dedicated jury that selects films from the festival’s competition, which are later screened as part of the CinéFID programme. These sessions are moderated by the exiled filmmakers themselves, fostering dialogue between creators and audiences while amplifying displaced perspectives.

FIDMarseille also promotes diversity through its “carte blanche” invitations, which allow curators, filmmakers, and scholars to design independent programmes within the festival. This approach decentralizes curatorial authority and ensures that programming remains plural, experimental, and internationally oriented.

Taken as a whole, FIDMarseille’s programming, outreach, and institutional practices reflect a sustained commitment to diversity, accessibility, and critical engagement. More than a platform for screenings, the festival operates as a cultural institution that views cinema as a democratic medium—capable of fostering dialogue, social integration, and meaningful participation across diverse communities.

## **Ji.HLAVA IDFF**

Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival is one of the most prominent documentary film events in Central and Eastern Europe. Held annually in Jihlava, Czech Republic, the festival is widely recognized for its innovative programming and its commitment to artistically ambitious, socially engaged, and thought-provoking documentaries. Beyond film screenings, Ji.hlava IDFF functions as a platform for critical discourse, bringing together filmmakers, scholars, journalists, and audiences to explore pressing cultural and societal issues.

The festival has long demonstrated a commitment to gender equality, not only through its programming but also through dedicated discussions and events addressing gender-related issues. This commitment was exemplified in 2019 through a collaboration with the Office of the Public Defender of Rights

and the NGO Open Society, resulting in a panel discussion on feminism. Such initiatives reflect the festival’s proactive engagement with contemporary social debates. This engagement became particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when rising rates of domestic violence prompted broader societal responses in the Czech Republic. In 2020, Ji.hlava IDFF responded to this context by refining its programme to highlight gender-related issues and amplify films addressing these urgent concerns.

The festival has also consistently foregrounded the work of women filmmakers. During its 27th edition, festival director Marek Hovorka emphasized Ji.hlava’s long-standing tradition of spotlighting pioneering female voices. In recent years, this commitment has been reflected in retrospectives dedicated to influential women filmmakers, including Susan Sontag (2021), Shirley Clarke (2022), Marguerite Duras (2023), and Anne-Marie Miéville (2024). Beyond this focus, the festival has actively engaged with underrepresented communities more broadly. It has supported research and programming centered on the Roma minority, showcased works by Roma filmmakers, and highlighted the contributions of African American filmmakers in the United States. Additionally, Ji.hlava has supported Ukrainian women film students based in Prague by presenting a curated block of their films addressing the social realities of the war in Ukraine.

Diversity and inclusivity are embedded within the festival’s curatorial framework. Ji.hlava IDFF actively selects films from underrepresented regions, fosters experimentation, and encourages innovation in documentary form. Sections such as Fascinations showcase experimental works from across the globe, highlighting new narrative languages and cinematic approaches. Emerging filmmakers are supported through initiatives such as

the Ji.hlava New Visions Forum, which in 2024 emphasized the next generation of European producers, hybrid formats, VR/AR documentaries, and innovative storytelling practices. By balancing established auteurs with emerging talent, the festival reflects the evolving landscape of contemporary audiovisual production.

The festival also prioritizes global representation. Programs such as the New Visions Forum: East & Southeast Asia create platforms for filmmakers from regions often underrepresented in European documentary cinema. Networking and co-production initiatives, including the Matchmaking Accelerator, facilitate the integration of these voices into the broader international industry. As curator Andrea Slováková has noted, Ji.hlava IDFF strives to include films from “every continent,” underscoring its commitment to global diversity and cultural exchange.

Accessibility and audience engagement are central to the festival’s ethos. The Short Joy section offers free online access to selected premieres, enabling broader participation and allowing audiences to engage with innovative works through the DAFilms Audience Award. Since 2018, the festival has adopted a family-friendly approach, offering workshops and creative programmes for children while parents attend screenings. Discounted accreditation and free screenings further ensure that students, seniors, and individuals with disabilities can participate fully in the festival experience.

Beyond its screenings, Ji.hlava IDFF positions itself as a dynamic platform for interdisciplinary dialogue. The Inspiration Forum—a six-day “festival of ideas”—brings together filmmakers, scientists, activists, journalists, and thinkers to engage in discussions on global transformations, societal

challenges, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Complementing this is the Sustainable Ji.hlava initiative, which reflects the festival's commitment to environmental responsibility by addressing social, ecological, and economic concerns through practical measures such as waste reduction, responsible food management, and community engagement.

The festival has also made notable progress in sustainable mobility. The implementation of a shared bicycle system in Jihlava enables attendees to navigate the city with minimal environmental impact, contributing to a reduction in the festival's carbon footprint. Alongside such initiatives, the festival continues to refine its practices in areas such as sustainable procurement, demonstrating a comprehensive commitment to environmentally responsible event management.

Overall, Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival represents a holistic approach to documentary cinema. Through its sustained commitment to gender equality, diversity, inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainability, the festival extends beyond film exhibition to actively cultivate a space for critical engagement, experimentation, and social impact. In doing so, it plays a significant role in shaping the global documentary landscape while fostering dialogue across cultures and generations.

## MILLENNIUM DOCS AGAINST GRAVITY

Millennium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival has demonstrated a substantial commitment to gender balance in its programming, reinforcing its role as a key advocate for equality and inclusivity within the documentary film industry. In 2022, the festival featured 90 female and 90 male directors in its Main Competition, underscoring the seriousness of its efforts to address gender disparities in filmmaking. Beyond programming, the festival has also advanced gender balance within its selection and judging processes. With a jury composed of 17 women and 13 men, it reflects a commitment to representation at multiple institutional levels. This balance supports more equitable evaluation by incorporating diverse perspectives into the assessment of artistic work.

Further strengthening its inclusive approach, the festival has adopted a hybrid format, enabling audiences across Poland to participate both in person and online. Guided by its motto, "Rethink Everything," the festival encourages filmmakers and audiences to reconsider questions of justice, equality, and gender representation—not only within cinema, but in society more broadly. By hosting the event across seven Polish cities while offering nationwide online access, it expands inclusivity beyond gender to encompass geographic accessibility, challenging the concentration of cultural events within a single urban center.

The festival's dedication to accessibility is reflected in concrete measures such as audio description and subtitling, ensuring participation regardless of physical ability. A particularly significant initiative focuses on accessibility for blind and low-vision audiences. During the 2020 edition, the festival implemented a hybrid format with in-person screenings across multiple cities

alongside nationwide online access. Crucially, selected films were equipped with audio descriptions and subtitles for Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, enabling individuals with visual or auditory impairments to fully engage with the programme. This effort was especially meaningful during the COVID-19 pandemic, when access to cultural events was significantly restricted. By moving beyond basic accommodations and actively integrating blind and low-vision audiences into the festival experience, Millennium Docs Against Gravity set a strong example of inclusive cultural programming.

At the same time, its programming engages diverse voices through themes such as climate change and LGBTQ+ awareness, broadening representation both on and off screen. By creating platforms for voices from marginalized communities—including those representing underrepresented gender and sexual identities—the festival further emphasizes the importance of social inclusivity within cultural expression. Workshops and accompanying events provide attendees with tools to better understand inclusive language and practices, fostering awareness and encouraging active allyship.

The festival also recognizes that meaningful diversity and inclusion must extend beyond programming into the film industry itself. Through the introduction of its industry section four years ago, it has taken steps to foster broader participation in the production process. This section now includes multiple pitching sessions featuring projects from Polish, Belarusian, and Ukrainian filmmakers, highlighting the festival’s regional commitment to supporting diverse voices within Eastern European cinema. Through talks, masterclasses, and panel discussions, the festival offers guidance on financing and distribution, contributing to more equitable professional opportunities within the documentary sector.

In addition to its focus on diversity and inclusion, Millennium Docs Against Gravity has positioned itself as an advocate for environmental sustainability. Initiatives such as the “Planeta nie jest na kredyt” (“The Planet Is Not on Credit”) campaign engage audiences in dialogue about ecological responsibility and sustainable living. These efforts underscore the festival’s broader role in addressing global challenges alongside cinematic storytelling.

Through these combined initiatives, Millennium Docs Against Gravity demonstrates that a film festival can serve not only as a platform for diverse narratives but also as an active agent of social and environmental change. Each edition becomes more than a presentation of films—it becomes a space for reflection, dialogue, and collective responsibility toward a more equitable and sustainable future.

## VISIONS DU RÉEL

Visions du Réel Film Festival has established itself as a leading international documentary festival committed to gender balance across its programming and initiatives. This dedication to parity reinforces its broader mission of inclusivity and equal representation within the film industry. Its selection of 165 films from 50 countries, including 88 world premieres, reflects a strong commitment to diversity. By intentionally integrating diverse voices and perspectives into its selection criteria, the festival works to ensure balanced representation among filmmakers.

Visions du Réel extends its commitment beyond programming to its executive and organizational structures, actively promoting women’s presence in key decision-making roles. This multi-layered approach is further reflected in industry initiatives such as a roundtable on gender equality, organized in partnership with the Swiss Women’s Audiovisual Network (SWAN) and the Swiss Syndicate for Film and Video (SSFV). With a particular focus on women’s representation within technical crews, the discussion brought together personal testimonies and industry data to address structural inequalities in film production.

In a significant step toward institutional accountability, the festival’s Executive President, Claude Ruey, and Artistic Director, Émilie Bujès, have signed the international Pledge for Gender Equality and Diversity in Film Festivals, initiated by SWAN. This pledge commits signatories to tracking and publishing gender-related statistics, particularly data on film submissions and selections. By prioritizing transparency, Visions du Réel not only strengthens its own accountability but also sets a benchmark for other festivals, encouraging sustained and measurable progress toward gender balance.

Accessibility is another central pillar of the festival’s strategy. For its 55th edition, Visions du Réel prioritized inclusivity and access for the widest possible audience. The introduction of “Relax” screenings in 2024—allowing audiences greater freedom to move, speak, or exit during screenings—demonstrates a flexible and audience-sensitive approach. Moreover, making all masterclasses freely accessible represents a significant step toward reducing exclusivity in what is traditionally an industry-oriented space. Ensuring that the masterclass by Alice Diop is interpreted into sign language, following a previously successful signed session, further underscores the festival’s commitment to

accessibility for hearing-impaired audiences and highlights the importance of full participation in its educational offerings.

At the core of the festival’s inclusive vision is a four-year strategic plan to systematically integrate accessibility across all operations. Recognizing that meaningful change requires time and structural adaptation, this plan strengthens existing measures while introducing new ones, including improved access for audiences with hearing, visual, and mobility impairments. Accessibility has long been central to Visions du Réel’s ethos. Its collaboration with local organizations such as Caritas Vaud since 2012, and more recently the Red Cross, provides additional pathways to reaching vulnerable or marginalized communities. These partnerships, grounded in expertise on the challenges faced by such groups, enhance the festival experience and broaden participation. A notable example is the annual presentation of audio-described films, developed in partnership with Regards Neufs since 2016, which ensures that visually impaired audiences can engage with the cinematic experience in a meaningful and immersive way.

Since its foundation, Visions du Réel has championed diversity by showcasing films often marginalized within mainstream circuits, particularly works by women and filmmakers from lower-production regions. Long before diversity became an industry priority, the festival actively challenged established norms. While its primary selection criterion remains high aesthetic quality, it maintains flexibility in thematic focus, narrative form, and directorial approach. This balance allows for bold and experimental storytelling while upholding strong artistic standards.

The festival is especially committed to supporting emerging voices, including first-time filmmakers and creators from under-resourced regions. By providing these projects with an international platform, it expands the socioeconomic and geographic scope of documentary cinema. Given documentary filmmaking's inherent engagement with real human experiences, Visions du Réel plays a crucial role in amplifying diverse perspectives through careful curation and targeted support for new talent.

Through its wide-ranging initiatives—from accessibility measures to talent development—Visions du Réel reaffirms its commitment to diversity, inclusion, and artistic innovation. More than a film festival, it serves as a cultural platform where cinematic storytelling becomes accessible to all. By fostering inclusive and forward-thinking documentary practices, Visions du Réel not only broadens participation but also enriches global cinematic discourse, positioning itself as a space where art and social impact meaningfully intersect.



This chapter was prepared by the Millennium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival and is based on a survey conducted across the Doc Alliance festival network. The questions of the survey were constructed in reference to several studies dedicated to film education in Europe, such as for example, the BFI's A framework for film education (funded by the European Commission in 2012) and the Compendium of Inspiring Practices on Inclusive and Citizenship Education (prepared by the ET 2020 Working Group on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education). Millennium Docs Against Gravity's survey focused on the following areas of interest: strategy, target groups and audiences, areas and ways of learning, cooperation with schools and other institutions, ways of funding, and community.

Film festivals associated within the Doc Alliance network have been organising multiple educational projects for over decades. Each festival has its own strategy for education activities.

## CPH:DOX

UNG:DOX is CPH:DOX's cross-country programme aimed at upper secondary schools with selected films, talks and academic presentations, specifically targeted at secondary school teaching in all subjects from Danish and social studies to biology and German. It was established in 2012 and is based on the idea that modern documentary film can provide students at Denmark's upper secondary schools with innovative, academic and cultural input into their education. CPH:DOX develops the film programme that ensures that films and events meet the requirements of the school curricula. Since many high school classes are not able to attend screenings during CPH:DOX's festival weeks, the festival also arranges educational screenings at other times of the year. In addition, CPH:DOX prepares academically relevant teaching material for several of the films.

CPH:DOX has one event each year aimed only at teachers who teach Danish literature and dedicated to exploring how to work with documentary films. The event is made in collaboration with the Danish Teachers Association. It's a full day with a screening of a documentary, a Q&A with the director, and different presentations on how to use film in education.

DOX:ACADEMY is CPH:DOX's other educational initiative that welcomes students from film schools, art academies and universities all over the world to take part in the festival. The DOX:ACADEMY accreditation offers full access to the festival programme of films, conferences and events.

## DOCLISBOA

APORDOC – Portuguese Documentary Association, the institution organising Doclisboa, has been organising its educational project for almost 14 years. The organisation aims to create spaces to discuss and build a more critical and open society, featuring documentary films as the point of contact between the audience and the world surrounding them. The programme they put forward, comprising film screenings, debates and workshops, is meant to help the audience relate to this kind of cinema and the emerging issues in history and contemporaneity. The debates following the screenings create the space for those worlds to communicate, with cinema acting as an intermediary. Whilst the workshops establish a space for reflection, involving the participants in visual and technical activities related to filmmaking.

APORDOC aims to connect all of its educational activities with the festival. It works with films presented in the previous editions of the festival, for example by organising screenings of short films that had been made during festival workshops.

Throughout the year, Doclisboa also has many educational activities for schools, open workshops for children from 6 to 16 years old and workshops organised in partnership with other associations, teachers' groups and cultural mediators.

For primary schools, APORDOC has an initiative called Docs4Kids that brings children and youths closer to documentary film, suggesting audiovisual or sensory exercises (or a combination of these) based on short films or excerpts from films associated with the issues and followed by a discussion

inspired by the films. For secondary schools, APORDOC organises Doc Escolas – Film Sessions For Schools. Each year the program is dedicated to a specific topic. Doclisboa also organises Training for Adults comprising training workshops for teachers and educators, which include sessions with the CinEd platform and one Doc Escolas session.

## DOK LEIPZIG

Leipziger Dok–Filmwochen GmbH, which organises DOK Leipzig, runs the project DOK Education (DOK Bildung). With DOK Education, DOK Leipzig is dedicated to teaching artistic documentaries and animated films. DOK Bildung offers students and teachers the opportunity to get to know documentary films as a film genre and as a medium of content. Among other things, DOK Leipzig also regularly increases its own level of awareness and opens up new audience groups. DOK Education projects take place both during the festival week and throughout the year. The project also promotes the development of political awareness and an awareness of other ways of life and perspectives. With the help of the festival films, DOK Education wants to convey to children, adolescents and young adults how valuable and worth protecting democratic structures are.

DOK Leipzig also organises one or two workshops for teachers per year, as well as “Teachers Day” – a full-day workshop for teachers, which is held during the week of the festival. The teacher training is organised in cooperation with Vision Kino, Germany's biggest film education institution. Teachers and schools can arrange a school visit by the DOK team before or after the screening for a preparatory or follow-up lesson in the school.

During this visit, pupils learn more about the subject of the film and analyse its style, genre or message. Teachers can also use DOK's free educational film material to prepare for and follow up the film screening individually. Selected films from the DOK LEIPZIG festival programme are available on the website for teachers to use them flexibly and work on them in class with the help of the school materials. Furthermore, in 2021 DOK LEIPZIG established an Educational Advisory Board which meets on a regular basis – it is composed of 10 members, a number of whom are teachers.

DOK Leipzig organises the Kids DOK section during the festival, where it shows short films (documentary and animation) to young audiences. DOK Leipzig also visits primary schools for whole film project days with films such as *Meine Wunderkammern*.

## FIDMARSEILLE

FIDMarseille runs image education programs throughout the year, including the SOYONS CRITIQUES workshop from 2022, which is dedicated to two groups of participants. One program is addressed to ten classes of high school and middle school students from various colleges and lycées in Marseille, the other one is dedicated to university students from Académie d'Aix-Marseille.

A monthly workshop is organised in middle schools and high schools in order to strengthen young people's understanding of images. Each month, the screenings and debates are therefore followed by a film criticism workshop. The workshop enables students to discover independent, innovative films, and to be accompanied in their initiation to critical analysis. The aim of the

workshop is to give students the tools they need to analyse images, and to help them develop their ability to express themselves both orally and in writing. The teachers themselves choose the films for the workshop, from a catalog of seven films from the festival's program. These sessions are supervised by the FIDMarseille artistic team. FIDMarseille also runs a programme for high schools and the 2nd Chance school – the students form a jury during the festival and award films of their choice.

FIDMarseille runs image education projects on a European scale through the summer school program. Every year, they partner with institutions in European countries to enable young people to take part in several film festivals. During the festival, they welcome groups of students to whom they offer a specific programme of meetings with filmmakers, in addition to all the screenings offered during the festival.

For the past 12 years, FIDMarseille has also organised the FIDCampus, a summer residency during the festival, enabling young film school students to present their films to experts. This week is also an opportunity for participants to meet filmmakers and other industry professionals.

## JI.HLAVA IDFF

DOC.DREAM Services, the organiser of the Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival, established the Center for Documentary Film (CDF) in 2014 as a year-round initiative to build upon the festival's heritage. Throughout the year, CDF organises over 220 activities for schools, children, seniors, film professionals, and the general public. It collaborates with 30 schools across

the Vysočina Region (Jihlava and the surrounding areas), developing and implementing educational programs that use audiovisual works – such as documentaries, feature films, and media content – to promote film, audiovisual, and media literacy.

CDF's educational initiatives employ film in multiple ways: as a tool for teaching and encouraging open discussions on various topics, including social issues; as a means of fostering a creative approach to reality; as a way to explore key filmmaking disciplines such as directing, cinematography, sound design, and editing; and as a platform for discussing information literacy and combating misinformation. Beyond theory, CDF also offers hands-on filmmaking workshops, covering video production, documentary filmmaking, and various fiction genres.

CDF provides a year-round study and creative space, which is open daily throughout the year, where visitors can access a specialised library focused on media and audiovisual studies, with an emphasis on documentary cinema. It also houses a video library with an archive of over 3,500 films screened at Ji.hlava IDFF, available for study purposes exclusively within the CDF space. Additionally, CDF offers editing stations for creative film projects. It runs a filmmakers' club for young enthusiasts and regional talents, focusing on documentary filmmaking, and provides practical training for students from local audiovisual schools.

Since 2018, the education of children and youth has also been part of the IDFF Ji.hlava programme within the Ji.hlava for Kids section. Through experiences and their own creations, children learn about the world around us, but also the world within us, and engage in discussions about contemporary issues. Children can take part in a range of educational activities that use creative learning and experiential pedagogy.

Activities targeted at adolescents from the age of 13 and young adults are developed separately under the umbrella of Ji.hlava Vibes from 2022 onwards. The mission is to offer knowledge and fun on topics that really interest young people. This is achieved through a participatory approach, where the programme is developed in dialogue with the young audience. Vibes complements the festival's accompanying programme with educational workshops, screenings of student films, fresh culture or discussions with inspiring figures of the young generation. Ji.hlava Vibes is not just a festival programme for youth – during our year-round activities, it gives young people the opportunity to learn how to be active citizens, and to express their opinions and experiences in order to positively influence things around them. The programme runs open calls for young filmmakers under the age of 20 and gives the opportunity to present their work at the festival.

During the Ji.hlava festival, CDF organises and coordinates student juries – one composed of secondary school students from Jihlava and another of university students from various fields of study across the Czech Republic. The goal is to foster in-depth discussions on documentary films, encourage critical argumentation, and offer students a meaningful and responsible “documentary position” at the festival.

CDF organises various events for teachers mainly focusing on training teachers in how to teach film, discussing the needs of teachers, and planning mutual cooperations and projects. In order to broaden teachers' awareness of the methods and educational benefits of film education, CDF organises film-education programs for schools as a part of Ji.hlava for Kids. The aim is to show the possibilities film offers, the means of expression it employs and how it can be used in the educational process. Similarly to the entire children's festival, these programmes are free of charge.

## MILLENNIUM DOCS AGAINST GRAVITY

Millennium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival organises the Documentary Academy, which is the only educational program in Poland based entirely on documentaries. The year-round project is dedicated to film and audiovisual education as well as to promoting the values shown in contemporary documentary films such as human rights, ecology, activism. Its mission is to attract new viewers to the widely popular genre of documentary film and to take up topics related to the surrounding world addressed by documentary films. The program is carried out in primary schools, secondary schools and universities. Films that open young people's eyes to various topics and fit into the new core curriculum of many school subjects are selected for the Documentary Academy's programme from the extensive festival catalogue. Screenings, workshops and lectures are organised in a few different cities in Poland year-round: Warsaw, Gdynia, Katowice, Poznań, Wrocław.

For MILLENNIUM DOCS AGAINST GRAVITY, secondary school students are one of the main target groups for educational projects. The festival organises special projects for secondary school students in cinemas during the year – among others, Film Fridays with Class. Documentary Academy at the Kinoteka Cinema in Warsaw.

Against Gravity, the organiser of the festival, also runs its own educational VOD platform dedicated mainly to secondary school and university students, Akademia.vod.mdag.pl. The platform is used, among others, in the project From Curiosity to Creativity. Documentary Films in School. The project is implemented in four schools in Warsaw, where students watch six films each semester.

Against Gravity also organises meetings with experts in schools as a part of this project. The aims of the project are not only to give knowledge about documentary films and topics raised by the directors, such as ecology, critical thinking about media, human rights and activism but also to encourage the students to make their own short film forms.

Millennium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival organises multiple projects for university students – throughout the semester programmes are organised both online and in cinemas, including: Film Faces of Pop Culture, Documentary Academy, Faces of Freedom. Students complete these programmes as part of their university classes. The most prestigious Polish universities such as the University of Warsaw and the University of Gdańsk are partners of the projects.

Millennium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival also runs a year round Education Advisory Board project involving teachers. The aim of the project is to provide knowledge and understanding of film as an educational tool among teachers. Once a month, in a cinema in Warsaw, the teachers attend a screening of one new film from the Documentary Academy's catalogue combined with workshops dedicated to topics such as psychology, ecology, human rights, history, and activism. The workshops help the teachers understand the advantages of using documentary films as a teaching tool in schools. The partner of the project is the Warsaw Center for Educational Innovation and Training, one of the most important institutions, whose mission is to develop teachers' knowledge in Poland. The admission for the screenings and workshops is free of charge for teachers.

Overall, the educational projects of Millennium Docs Against Gravity help the festival to build long-standing relationships with teachers, university and high school students. They also help to attract a larger audience to the festival.

## VISIONS DU RÉEL

Making documentary filmmaking accessible to all has long been a priority for Visions du Réel. The festival's goal is to bring it within everyone's reach – allowing people to discover new cultures or gain deeper insights into their own, see the world from different perspectives, learn, imagine, and dream. To achieve this, Visions du Réel focuses on four key objectives:

- Facilitating access to films and activities
- Encouraging the development of critical judgment
- Showcasing the diversity of existing cinematographic languages
- Including spectators with disabilities

To achieve these goals, a variety of cultural activities are offered, including special screenings of documentary films, discussions to enhance critical thinking, hands-on short film production, and initiatives to raise awareness of different ways films can be perceived – particularly through the introduction of audio descriptions for all audiences.

Primary school students are targeted through the young audience program during the festival, which is subsequently repeated at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Marseille. Furthermore, School screenings with La Lanterne magique is an introduction to documentary film through extracts and age-appropriate activities.

Visions du Réel organises school screenings with introductions and Q&As with filmmakers. Moreover, it has a free-of-charge educational platform, VdR at School, with more than fifty documentaries from previous festival editions accessible year round to teachers for screenings at schools. Every month, a new film with accompanying educational materials is added to the platform. Through the platform, Visions du Réel wishes to contribute to the initiation of students to non-fiction cinema, to the moving image and to the multiple realities of the contemporary world. The films are classified by subject, grade level and theme, and accompanied by educational materials and suggested activities to be carried out around the screening of the film.

For higher education students Visions du Réel organises the New Generation project. The project offers students in film classes (art schools, universities, film or visual arts options at secondary schools, etc.) the opportunity to actively participate in the Festival with a customised programme.

Visions du Réel also runs training courses for teachers once or twice a year. These courses provide ideas for working with students on non-fiction films and encourage exchanges between specialists and teachers.

## SUMMARY

Documentary film festivals that belong to the Doc Alliance network play an important role in the whole film educational process on the European level. It is important to mention that the experience gathered by festival organisers associated with the Doc Alliance network during their respective festival periods is used in year-round educational work with diverse target groups.

Five of the network's film festivals organise their educational projects with 50% or more share of funds from subsidies. Furthermore, in a situation of limited institutional support, some of these festivals act as advocates introducing young people to film, the principles governing the contemporary audiovisual sphere, and contemporary challenges taken up by documentary filmmakers. Due to the diverse educational policies pursued in individual European Union countries, educational programmes conducted by many institutions associated with the Doc Alliance network respond in a variety of ways to the needs of filling certain educational gaps. The challenges experienced by the festivals of the network are often similar due to the lack of film as an autonomous subject in schools in the majority of the countries where the festivals are organised. For example, CPH:DOX helps Danish teachers to get more familiar with working with documentary films, which are now an obligatory element of the Danish literature curriculum. Whilst over the past eight years, Millennium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival has been promoting documentary film as an educational tool to fill the gap connected with the understanding of ecology, women's rights, human rights, psychology, and LGBTQ rights in Poland.



Still, some of the network's festivals describe their activities as complementary to those of state and European institutions. The festivals that mention a different situation in the area of the school system are FIDMarseille and Ji.hlava IDFF. In France (FIDMarseille), film literacy can be an autonomous subject, although it is not offered in every school and it is not a mandatory subject. Meanwhile, in 2024, Film and Audiovisual Literacy was officially incorporated into the Czech Framework Education Programme as an optional, stand-alone school subject. Its inclusion depends largely on proactive teachers and on student demand, so new challenges have now emerged – motivating schools, teachers, and students to embrace this opportunity and integrate film and audiovisual literacy into their curricula. To address this, Ji.hlava IDFF actively promotes the use of documentaries and feature films as valuable educational tools through a diverse range of activities, events, seminars, workshops, and screenings.

On the other hand, not so many of the festivals dedicate their educational programs to primary school students. And only a few of the festivals provide whispered audio description/audio description; sign translation; subtitles for people with visual impairment; or organise educational screenings in cinemas architecturally adapted for people with disabilities. It can be assumed that there is a need for more support in this area of film education.

The educational role of film festivals is also fulfilled in tasks that connect national institutions, schools, universities, NGOs, and educational planners, in order to help build the visual sensitivity of young people in the most complete way.



It is at the core of documentary film festivals joined in the Doc Alliance Network to care deeply about the social and environmental challenges of the world we live in. All seven of them (CPH:DOX, Doclisboa, DOK Leipzig, FIDMarseille, Ji.hlava IDFF, Millennium Docs Against Gravity and Visions du Réel) are aware of the environmental impact that organisation of a film festival might have, and all are trying to implement measures to minimise it.

However, it is not an easy feat for festival organisers to assess which measures might be the most effective — the questions raised are often connected to areas of expertise different from those of film and culture. Which energetic solutions for powering the cinemas would be the most environmentally friendly? How to assess the impact made by using single-use paper cups versus reusable plastic ones? And how to monitor something so vast and intangible as the CO2 emissions of a week-long event?

By compiling this research of environmental sustainability measures, the Doc Alliance Network aims to take the first step towards coordinated effort in minimising the environmental footprint of their festival organisation. Guided by scientific methodologies already existing in this area, this research aims to categorise all areas in which strategies towards environmental sustainability might be implemented and assess the strong and weak points of the existing measures.

The Doc Alliance Network strongly believes in the power of sharing and learning from each other. By organising film festivals, Doc Alliance affects hundreds of thousands of people throughout Europe and worldwide, and creates events that are not only about the films themselves, but about the atmosphere of togetherness, learning, and collective effort towards shared goals and principles for humanity. Environmental sustainability is one of those principles, and this research is therefore one of the ways of showing the long-term commitment of Doc Alliance to act responsibly in a world experiencing the climate crisis.

In compiling this chapter, it was crucial to take inspiration from the substantial amount of research already done by experts in festival sustainability — with ecological impact being a focus of many national and European-level governmental and NGO bodies, it is helpful to compile existing knowledge instead of “inventing the wheel” by trying to come up with brand new methodology.

The choice of areas of interest was inspired by the European Green Festival Roadmap 2030 put together by the European Festival Association YOUROPE in 2023. The Roadmap was a result of a collaboration with experts from A Greener Future (AGF) and Greener Events Norway as well as YOUROPE’s GO Group (Green Operations Europe) think tank.

Film festival organisation inevitably impacts the environment: bringing thousands of people together to one place, feeding them, managing the waste they create, but also providing the cinemas and other venues with energies, building festival architecture and set design, or communicating the events and their programs online and offline necessarily uses resources. When assessing festival environmental impact, it is crucial to look at the wholeness of festival organisation and its various parts in their complexity. For such an assessment, multiple expertise is needed: understanding the limits and implications of energetic sustainability, waste management practices, being able to assess the environmental impact of the production and recycling of different kinds of materials.

It's understandable that such an expertise is not usually found within the teams organising film festivals, and therefore it's helpful to turn to already existing research done in the area of sustainable event organisation. One such example is the European Green Festival Roadmap 2030 compiled by the European Festival Association in 2023 which suggests breaking down the environmental approach into several categories. That inspired the compilation of the Doc Alliance environmental sustainability research and its division of questions into 6 areas: strategy, energy, waste and materials, food and beverages, travel and transport, and community.

Those areas also reflect the most pressing problems as defined by the European Green Festival Roadmap 2030. Some of them are more straightforward (such as avoiding the use of single use plastics), but others are reliant on more advanced approaches requiring monitoring the CO2 emissions of fossil fuel power usage and travel & transport, or food and beverage production. The sustainable organisation of film festivals is therefore reliant not only on the approach of the festival team itself, but of the broader conditions of the particular states and cities where the festivals take place, and, ultimately, on the limits of financing.

Breaking down the sustainability approach into smaller, more comprehensive parts makes the vast endeavour of achieving festival carbon neutrality more manageable, as well as allowing for clearer identification of problem areas and good practices. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that the conditions and possibilities of organising film festivals across Europe varies greatly, and all of the 7 countries where Doc Alliance festivals take place have different possibilities and limitations. For example, it is easier to have access to sustainable energies in some countries than in others, the waste management practices differ across Europe, the possibilities of road/rail travel are different for Central Europe than for Portugal/Denmark and so on. The aim of this research is therefore to make a complex assessment of what is currently being done at the Doc Alliance festivals, to identify the problem areas and to suggest possible ways of improvement in the particular areas in focus.



## STRATEGY

In order to make effective progress with festival sustainability, a clear strategy and its communication is needed. The questions in this area aimed to find out what kind of strategies the Doc Alliance festivals implement, if they monitor their environmental sustainability progress (qualitatively and quantitatively) or if there's someone within the festival staff responsible for the implementation of sustainable measures. For the sustainability strategy to be effective, it is necessary to uphold it as a priority in all the festival decision-making and by the whole festival team.

**THE FESTIVALS WERE FIRSTLY ASKED ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY IN WHICH THEY WOULD ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY. SOME EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES WERE AS FOLLOWS:**

- Doclisboa has implemented a Good Practices Guide for the festival team that gives tips on how to handle the prevention of waste and how to recycle correctly, how to limit the usage of water and energy, and how to limit transport and travel, but also food production emissions. Although the document is not stating specific goals to achieve, it includes a good overview of what the festival staff can do in their everyday practices. The Guide includes a tip on how to calculate the emissions of flights bought by the festival in an easy way – by checking the CO2 emissions of specific flights using the Google Flights tool. Noting down the emissions makes it easier to monitor the footprint of the festival in this area.

- FIDMarseille communicates their environmental values and achievements publicly on their website, mostly focusing on recycling and reusing materials, sustainable food and local sourcing of services. The website mentions a clear and quantified achievement of FIDMarseille environmental measures: managing to reduce paper waste by 90% in four years thanks to digital communication. With the drive towards obtaining an Eco-fest label, FIDMarseille is currently working on a more precise strategy.
- Ji.hlava has been implementing a sustainable strategy since 2019. Every year, it focuses on a different area in which it looks for new and better solutions depending on the newest research. Ji.hlava communicates its environmental sustainability strategies on their website publicly, focusing on five distinct areas: waste, food, mobility, energy, and community. Although the data-based approach is still limited, Ji.hlava is trying to set strategic clear goals where possible, for example by setting the goal of reducing the waste production by 10% every year or by calculating the reduction of energy consumption thanks to sustainable measures “by tens of percent compared to previous years.”
- Visions du Réel implemented an internal sustainability policy and reviewed it in a public 2022 festival report. It mainly focused on 3 areas of interest: mobility, travel and accommodation. The Report is an overview of the achievements in particular areas. The report offers a clearly communicated measurable impact that Visions du Réel has achieved: reducing the festival waste by 60% between 2019 and 2022 (from 13.64 to 5.51 tonnes). In 2025, Visions du Réel planned to conduct a complete carbon audit and set up workshops for the permanent team.

## **SECONDLY, THE FESTIVALS WERE ASKED ABOUT HOLDING SUSTAINABILITY TRAININGS FOR THEIR STAFF (EITHER FULL-TIME, PART-TIME OR VOLUNTEERS) AND HOW DO THEY CONDUCT THEM.**

Most of the Doc Alliance festivals don't hold regular sustainability trainings for the festival staff. However, the festivals brief their workers informally, mostly through self-organised groups or in specific departments (production, guest service). And some of the Doc Alliance festivals are engaged in local sustainable groups connecting regional festivals – for example, FIDMarseille has been a part of the Collectif des Festivals Éco-responsables et Solidaires en Région Sud (COFEES) since 2021. Joining powers with local festivals may be the most effective since they're affected by the same challenges and limitations.

## **ANOTHER QUESTION THE FESTIVALS WERE ASKED IS WHETHER THERE IS SOMEONE FROM THE FESTIVAL STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES.**

Setting aside a specific budget for sustainability practices is a helpful way to make sure that environmental concerns are not sidelined in important decision making. The same way, identifying a specific person responsible for sustainability strategies and their implementation and setting a specific budget and work hours for them helps the environmental sustainability not to be forgotten among other festival agenda.

IDFF Ji.hlava has had a position of an Environmental Ombudsperson since 2019. This person is not someone from the festival team, but an external hire, an expert in environmental sustainability. This is helpful in assessing the festival practices with fresh eyes and without the biases that someone

organising a festival necessarily has. It also brings the skills necessary for an expert assessment of which practices are more environmentally friendly – what seems like an eco-friendlier solution in an uneducated guess is not always the more sustainable solution (e.g. using recyclable tableware vs. using partly-recycled tableware made from composite materials that needs to be discarded in general waste). It is understandable that festival organisers don't have that expertise, and therefore hiring someone external is beneficial. The current Eco ombudsman found herself a team of volunteers who help her with research and some administrative agenda.

#### **ANOTHER QUESTION ADDRESSED THE FESTIVALS WAS ABOUT INFORMING THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES THEY IMPLEMENT.**

Good examples of existing communication strategies were, for instance – having a section of the festival website dedicated to environmental measures; communicating sustainability strategies and calls for action on social media; informing the public about sustainability measures in annual reports; or awarding a film for its environmental impact.

#### **ANOTHER AREA OF INQUIRY WAS ABOUT MONITORING AND REVIEWING THE FESTIVALS' SUSTAINABLE MEASURES AND THEIR OUTCOMES THROUGHOUT THE YEARS.**

Most of the Doc Alliance festivals were not systematically monitoring the impact of their sustainability measures, such as calculating the CO2 emissions of the specific areas (waste production, energy usage, emissions of guest travel). Yet, several of them were starting to do so during the 2024–2025 festival editions. Notably, since 2022, Doclisboa has been collecting carbon emissions

data regarding transportation, waste and disposable materials. Having datasets from multiple editions is necessary to assess the progress and the most effective sustainability strategies.

#### **THE LAST QUESTION IN THE SECTION WAS ABOUT THE RULES FESTIVALS HAVE WHEN IT COMES TO ACCEPTING SPONSORSHIP REGARDING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SPONSORS/PARTNERS.**

The Doc Alliance festivals don't have written rules regarding accepting new sponsors, but they are evaluating them case by case and study their social and environmental sustainability policies closely. One of the festivals cut a sponsorship from a company which is a significant environmental polluter in the region where the festival is taking place.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Even though the Doc Alliance strategic activities have grown significantly in the recent years, there is still space for improvement. Compiling and communicating a comprehensive strategy is a crucial part of effective festival approach towards environmental sustainability. Although most of the Doc Alliance festivals are trying to put together their sustainability measures and communicating them towards the public, a more strategic approach including setting clear measurable goals and a systematic way of informing the public would be beneficial. However, it is necessary to note that such an approach requires a significant budget and expertise, and its implementation is not hindered by the unwillingness of Doc Alliance festivals, but by the limitations of financing and local sustainable infrastructures.

Based on this research, the following measures are suggested as the key points of focus: setting a specific budget for sustainability activities and a responsible person with decision-making powers and set work hours; compiling clear sustainability guidelines that sum up the existing measures and both short-term and long-term goals for all the areas of festival organisation that impact the environment; communicating the festival sustainability strategies clearly and regularly with the public but also with the festival staff; evaluating the possibility of environmental certification.

## ENERGY

Generating energy is one of the biggest sources of Greenhouse Gas emissions globally. Although it is often not in the film festival's possibilities to use renewable energies instead of the ones sourced from fossil fuels, there are certain good practices to be employed when it comes to energy consumption and reduction. However, those are often reliant on the national electricity grid limitations, since green electricity options vary across Europe. This research therefore aims to compare the situation of sustainable energy practices of Doc Alliance festivals and the limitations they encounter.

### **THE FIRST QUESTION WAS – HAVE YOU EXPLORED THE POSSIBILITIES OF USING GREEN ENERGY SUPPLIERS FOR YOUR OFFICE?**

For several Doc Alliance festivals, choosing the energy supplier is not in their competences because it's handled by the owners of the office premises such as private owners or municipalities. Two festivals already use green energy sources for their offices, while one is planning to start doing so in near future.

However, these festivals are located in countries where such solutions are more common and more easily available (Denmark, Germany, France).

### **ANOTHER QUESTION ADDRESSED IN THIS AREA WAS: DO YOUR FESTIVAL VENUES USE GREEN ENERGY OR ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF ENERGY?**

As with the office premises, it is often not in the power of Doc Alliance festivals to influence the energy sourcing of its venues. What can be done is trying to communicate the sustainability goals and expectations with the venue operators, steering them in the right direction. For example, Doclisboa requested the sustainability plan of each festival venue – and although only one out of four has a certificate on Environmental Management System, it sends a signal to the venues that sustainability is a priority. Another Doc Alliance festival, IDFF Ji.hlava, uses a main venue which has its own solar panels. However, since film festivals are specific types of events requiring a specific kind of venues (cinemas), film festival organisers usually don't have much of a choice when selecting the festival venues, especially if they are organised in a smaller city.

### **ANOTHER AREA OF INQUIRY WAS ABOUT MONITORING THE FESTIVALS' ENERGY CONSUMPTION:**

- CPH:DOX is measuring the festival energy consumption using tools such as Green Producers Tool or Julie's Bicycle. Sharing more information with the other festivals about how the usage of these tools works like in practice could inspire them to work with such tools as well.
- Doclisboa is not responsible for contracting the energy supply in any circumstance. The city hall is the contractor for the festival office, and

the venues are the contractors for their own energy usage. It would be worth finding out if the data of the energy consumption could be obtained, nevertheless. It is notable that in its Sustainable Guidelines for the staff, Doclisboa focuses on tips on sustainable energy usage, such as avoiding using the air-conditioning excessively or turning off the lights, electronic devices and plugs/extensions when not in use.

- DOK Leipzig monitors its energy consumption in the office, but not at the festival venues – a flat rate rental agreement is used; therefore, energy consumption data is not provided.
- Ji.hlava manages to monitor the energy consumption of some venues, but not all of them. However, the plan is to obtain data from all of them in the future. On its website, the festival states:
- “Although we are dependent on the cinema’s energy suppliers and those of other festival venues, we take responsibility for saving and reducing our consumption. We do not shine lights where they are not necessary, we do not overheat the spaces, and as a result we reduced energy consumption by tens of percent compared to previous years.”
- Visions du Réel has not yet set up a monitoring system of its energy consumption due to a lack of human and financial resources. It is necessary to take this concern seriously, as monitoring the festival energy consumption thoroughly and responsibly does take up a significant number of work hours and expertise, and therefore is financially costly. However, in 2025, Visions du Réel planned to conduct a full carbon audit, including energy consumption.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the area of energy, a certain lack of decision-making power is hindering making a lot of changes. It is often the case that the festivals are not in the position to influence where the energy that powers their offices and festival venues is coming from. However, progress in this area is visible and significant changes have been made already, particularly in countries where sustainable energy sourcing is more prevalent and available. The progress in this area will therefore inevitably come with the better accessibility of sustainable energy sourcing in respective countries as well.

The recommended practices in this area are as follows: researching the possibility of switching to green energy suppliers in festival offices and venues and if it’s not in the decision-making powers of the festival to switch, it would be helpful to communicate the importance of sustainability with the venues; monitoring the energy consumption both in the offices and at the festival venues – compiling data throughout several festival editions can show which approaches are the most effective; communicating energy saving practices with the festival audience and staff clearly and regularly.

## WASTE AND MATERIALS

The production of waste is an inevitable part of any event gathering thousands of people to one place for multiple days. The strategy of film festivals to handle this area sustainably is twofold: to reduce the amount of waste produced by the festival and its audience (notably the single-use plastic waste), and to make sure that the waste is handled sustainably (recycled when possible).

The questions in this survey tried to find out how waste is handled and what kinds of waste are recycled by the Doc Alliance festivals, how is its volume reduced and monitored, and what kind of strategies are the festivals implementing to make sure that the festivals don't create more waste than necessary.

When it comes to recycling in the office, all Doc Alliance festivals have already implemented the recycling of paper, glass, and plastic. 5 out of 7 festivals also recycle organic waste – however, such recycling is often dependent on the possibilities of local waste management. 4 festivals also recycle metal.

The standard paper-glass-plastic recycling is implemented at venues of all Doc Alliance festivals. At four of them, organic waste is also recycled. Three festivals also recycle metal.

However, film festivals have multiple venues, sometimes even in different cities. It is challenging to ensure that all the venues have recycling stations, or that they're adequately taken care of. Waste is also handled differently in different countries – from landfills to more sustainable waste-to-energy facilities. Festival organisers should educate themselves on where the waste from their festival venues ends up.

**ONE QUESTION ANALYSED IN THIS SECTION WAS ABOUT HOW THE FESTIVALS ACTIVELY PREVENT THE PRODUCTION OF WASTE? SOME USEFUL EXAMPLES INCLUDED:**

- Doclisboa: “We don't use disposable materials for coffee breaks, cocktails and office activities. We use reusable bottles and cups on Q&A's, round tables, guests and festival team. For the snack breaks, the volunteers didn't

use individual juice packages and last year, we produced a 100% reusable photo-call by not mentioning the festival edition. We reused the lanyards. In this year, we started a partnership with ReCreate – an up-cycling design studio to whom we will deliver some of our promotional waste and they will produce accessories from it. We encourage the festival's team to reduce the printing.”

- Ji.hlava IDFF: “When it comes to merch for example – we do not use extra packaging. When you buy something in our festival store, we do not use anything to wrap it in. We are not printing extra materials that are not necessary (this year we cut a lot of printed festival materials). We use reusable cups throughout all festival venues – so you pay a deposit and then you can use the cup over and over again (we avoid using plastic cups this way).”
- FIDMarseille: “Our festival doesn't have any temporary bars or restaurants: we work with local establishments that supply their own glasses, cutlery and plates, which automatically reduces the amount of waste produced.”
- CPH:DOX: “We have just implemented a new waste handling station in our offices and will do the same at our festival venues. We encourage all departments to reuse materials, or only print materials that can be reused and cut down on printed materials. We supply all staff and volunteers with reusable water bottles. We only use caterers who actively work with prevention of waste and organic materials.”

### **ANOTHER AREA OF INQUIRY WAS ABOUT HAVING CIRCULAR/SUSTAINABLE/ GREEN PROCUREMENT CRITERIA FOR TENDERING NEW PRODUCTS AND SERVICES?**

Most Doc Alliance festivals do consider sustainability criteria whenever choosing a new supplier. It mostly applies to services such as catering (aiming for vegetarian, local or organic food), but also recycled stationery or renting electric cars for guest transport. However, this approach is not formalised, and no written criteria exist for choosing new services as of yet.

### **ANOTHER QUESTION IN THE SURVEY WAS ABOUT IMPLEMENTING MEASURES REGARDING THE DIGITAL WASTE OF YOUR FESTIVAL OFFICE.**

It is sometimes forgotten that moving from analogue to digital does not necessarily automatically mean going zero-waste. Storing big amounts of data also comes with its environmental costs and increased energy usage. So far, most Doc Alliance festivals haven't focused on the digital footprint. However, certain good practices can already be traced: for example, FIDMarseille uses local servers with reduced environmental impact and advanced Power Usage Effectiveness. Another festival that keeps digital waste in mind is CPH:DOX which is undergoing a restructuring of database and mail accounts in Google Drive:

“This means we will limit the number of e-mail addresses we create in a year, cut down on documents by deleting unused files and have implemented Slack for internal communication in order to cut down on internal e-mails. Our next big thing for the next festival edition, is to analyse our print department in order to cut down on files being sent, down and uploaded and stored to and from the festival.”

### **ANOTHER QUESTION THE FESTIVALS ANSWERED WAS: DO YOU PRINT OUT CATALOGUES, BROCHURES, FLYERS AND POSTERS FOR THE FESTIVAL AND IN WHAT QUANTITIES?**

Printed communication is a must for all the festivals, but the sustainability strategies of moving to digital are more and more prevalent. Multiple Doc Alliance festivals have dramatically reduced the number of printed catalogues or went fully digital (FIDMarseille & IDFF Ji.hlava since 2023). Visions du Réel has reduced printing by 30% since 2019, FIDMarseille by 90% when all printed communication (flyers, invitations, press kits) are taken into consideration.

CPH:DOX is currently working on creating a festival app for future editions in order to completely cut away the printed newspaper. However, they are in the process of analysing whether that will actually have a larger carbon footprint, rather than the printed version. Same as with the digital waste, it is important to note that using digital solutions also comes with environmental footprint of its own, such as increased energy usage needed for the development and implementation of a mobile phone app.

Furthermore, digital communication is not accessible for everyone. Keeping some printed formats is helpful to communicate festival program in an accessible way to certain groups of people. Moreover, it can serve as a memorabilia or education material that is not often not discarded when the festival ends. Therefore, it is crucial to assess carefully what kinds of print formats will be discontinued.

**FESTIVAL MERCH WAS ANOTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENT TO ANALYSE – WHAT KINDS OF ITEMS AND IN WHAT QUANTITIES ARE PRODUCED AND WHAT IS DONE WITH THE MERCH IF IT’S NOT SOLD?**

- CPH:DOX produces merchandise printed on organic fair trade cotton. The following items are produced: T-shirts (more than half of which are for volunteers), hoodies, posters, tote bags (used mainly for industry guests), keychains (used mainly for industry guests and volunteers). They are yet to implement larger sustainability strategies in this field but are aiming to replace the volunteer t-shirts with a badge and looking into having a t-shirt printer at the festival centre, so audience and volunteers can bring their own t-shirts to be printed on.
- Doclisboa produces merchandise to offer to guests and festival volunteers during the festival (tote bags and T-shirts). They reduced the usage of coloured ink and produce only 100% cotton tote bags. The leftover merchandise is offered to potential partners in meetings during the year, and also sold in the following editions.
- DOK Leipzig produces cotton tote bags for the festival guests. Prior to the festival, the guest management team asks all accredited visitors to use their own bags if possible. In 2024, the festival reduced the number of cotton tote bags for the first time, providing a small number of recycled paper bags instead. To produce the tote bags, DOK Leipzig uses screen printing, which is an efficient use of materials as it allows a high ink coverage with a low ink usage, which enhances both the durability and quality of the bags.
- In the past, FIDMarseille produced two merchandise items: tote bags and T-shirts. Tote bag leftovers are sold during the next editions of the festival and distributed among interns and volunteers. FIDMarseille has stopped producing T-shirts, now the T-shirts are only made for the staff members. Those T-shirts do not contain a mention of a specific edition and are thus reusable during subsequent editions.
- Ji.hlava IDFF does produce festival merchandise, but since they are implementing the sustainable strategies in this area, they minimised the production to the basic products that are very popular and usually sold out. At the end of the festival, the festival always gives discounts to encourage visitors to buy the leftovers. If the products are not sold, they always sell “vintage” merch next year(s) for a reasonable price. Other leftovers are given away during the year as thank you gifts for the partners, sponsors, or given to schools and universities to their charity activities. Ji.hlava has started to sell up-cycled bags made from previous banners.
- Ji.hlava has also replaced lots of merchandise articles with edible merch (honey, marmalade, syrups) from local suppliers of farmers. In 2024, the festival focused on the issues of textile, which means they switched some textile materials in their merch to more sustainable ones, or the ones with sustainable certificates. Ji.hlava collaborated with a local sewing social enterprise that integrates people with disabilities on one of their merch bags and gave all the profit from this specific merch to the enterprise.
- Millennium Docs Against Gravity produces T-shirts – they have recently switched to more sustainable merchandise. The T-shirts are produced by a Polish sustainable company, sewn in Poland, and made from organic

cotton. This change reflects the festival's commitment to supporting local businesses and reducing its environmental impact, while offering high-quality, eco-friendly products to its audience. MDAG produces festival bags which are made from banners from previous years, so they are fully recycled.

- Visions du Réel does not produce festival merchandising. However, it produces fanny bags to give to the festival guest and festival volunteers and staff. If there are some leftovers, they are sold at the events all-year-long.

**LASTLY, THE QUESTION OF HOW TO PREVENT THE PRODUCTION OF SINGLE-USE (PLASTIC) ITEMS IN OTHER AREAS OF THE FESTIVAL (TYPES OF ACCREDITATIONS, LANYARDS, TICKETING) WAS RAISED.**

The Doc Alliance festivals implement multiple special measures aiming to limit single-use waste that necessarily comes with festival production:

- Digital Ticketing: All festivals have adopted dematerialised ticketing, ensuring that tickets are virtual and eliminating the need for physical paper tickets.
- Accreditation Innovations: Some festivals have shifted to paper or cardboard accreditation badges instead of plastic. Participants are encouraged to reuse their old accreditations, with new stickers applied when necessary.
- Encouragement of Reuse: Attendees and staff are motivated to bring and reuse their old lanyards. Reuse of festival decoration and navigation is also often implemented.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the survey illustrate a proactive approach to waste separation, recycling practices at festival venues, and efforts to minimise single-use materials, such as using reusable items for food and beverages, or producing sustainable merchandising.

While festivals are increasingly adopting digital alternatives, attention to digital waste is still emerging. Some festivals are examining the environmental impact of their digital operations, suggesting a need for a balanced approach to minimise both physical and digital waste, and a more thorough approach in this regard will be needed in the future.

However, as in other areas, the constraint of resources is a valid issue. Festivals often operate under tight budgets, which can make it difficult to prioritise sustainable practices, such as purchasing higher-quality recycled materials or investing in complex waste management systems.

Based on this survey, the following strategies in the area of waste and materials are recommended: think circularly in every area of festival production – consider what can be reused or repurposed for multiple festival editions; enhance community engagement and education; stick to good purchasing procedures whenever possible by for example, choosing the environmentally friendly option when purchasing any products or materials; if possible, monitor the amount of waste produced throughout several festival editions, and identify locations that produce a lot of waste and use this data to assess how to possibly reduce it.

## FOOD AND BEVERAGES

Integrating sustainability into the food and beverage offerings at film festivals not only enhances the guest experience but also sets a standard for environmental responsibility within the industry. Catering choices reflect the festival's commitment to sustainable practices, influencing everything from the sourcing of ingredients to the management of waste.

There are several ways to ensure food and beverage sustainability to minimise the environmental impact of festival organisation, and this part of the survey investigated what kinds of strategies the Doc Alliance festivals implement in this area.

### THE FIRST QUESTION CENTRED ON THE KIND OF CATERING PROVIDED FOR THE GUESTS, VISITORS AND STAFF – LOCAL, SEASONAL AND/OR VEG(ETARI)AN CATERING?

- CPH:DOX is a vegetarian festival and has been for more than 5 years. They only book local, seasonal and mainly organic catering for both guests and staff.
- Doclisboa offers catering that is 100% local, 100% seasonal and 70% vegetarian. In 2024, they raised the vegetarian/vegan rate to 75%. The snacks for volunteers are 100% vegetarian.
- The catering offered by DOK Leipzig is mostly vegetarian/vegan, although not specifically local or seasonal. Volunteers are provided with daily lunch bags (vegetarian).

- The catering of FIDMarseille is supplied by a local supplier from Marseille that always offers a vegetarian meal. This caterer uses both seasonal and local products. The festival also has a partnership with a Marseille nature wine supplier.
- Since 2019, IDFF Ji.hlava has had vegetarian catering for staff and for events such as industry party and industry drinks. For catering, Ji.hlava tries to be as seasonal as possible. From 2023, they have approached multiple regional farmers who are giving the festival food which they would have thrown away (initiative “Save the food” / Zachraň jídlo).
- However, as in other sustainability practices, it must be noted that local and regional food is usually more expensive, and therefore it is not always possible to provide it at all events of the festival for budget reasons.
- Millennium Docs Against Gravity books catering through local companies. Since several past editions, only vegetarian and vegan food is served at festival events.
- Visions du Réel uses mostly local and vegetarian catering with limited meat options.

In terms of leftovers, the main strategy of Doc Alliance festivals is preventing the existence of any food leftovers to begin with. However, in the cases when there is leftover food or groceries at the end of the festival, multiple festivals cooperate with local NGOs that distribute the food to the people in need (done by CPH:DOX, Doclisboa with Portuguese Center for Refugees, or IDFF Ji.hlava with Food Not Bombs).

### **ANOTHER ELEMENT OF RESEARCH WAS ABOUT THE KIND OF TABLEWARE AND SERVE-WARE USED FOR THE FESTIVALS' CATERING AND IN THE FESTIVAL FOOD STALLS.**

Most of the Doc Alliance festivals use recyclable tableware, providing respective recycling stations to ensure its recycling. Some of the festivals also use compostable tableware and serve-ware, but it is challenging to ensure its proper disposal since the bio-waste collection is not as common as the recycling of plastic. The most environmentally friendly solution would be to stop using single-use tableware altogether – for example, CPH:DOX has managed to get rid of it almost completely and plans to replace even the compostable cups solution with washable tableware. Another green solution has been implemented by IDFF Ji.hlava which uses washable reusable plastic cups at festival venues and food stalls.

### **THE LAST ELEMENT OF INQUIRY IN THIS AREA WAS WHETHER FREE DRINKING WATER IS AVAILABLE FOR GUESTS AT THE FESTIVAL VENUES (WATER DISPENSERS, POTABLE TAP WATER).**

Access to drinking water at Doc Alliance festivals is increasingly prioritised, reflecting a commitment to sustainability as well as attendee well-being. Most festivals provide free potable tap water, either through accessible water dispensers or directly in venues. Although tap water is potable in all cities where the Doc Alliance festivals are taking place, it helps to encourage the festival audiences actively to drink it. That's why some festivals have equipped venues with water dispensers and aquamats (like CPH:DOX, which partnered with Danish company Postevand, who supply the festival with tap water in recyclable cartons). Others, like Millennium Docs Against Gravity, are actively working towards enhancing access by collaborating with city initiatives promoting tap water consumption.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In order to reduce the impact of food and beverage choices and related waste, the Doc Alliance festivals could employ the following suggestions: prioritise products that have a smaller carbon footprint, i.e. plants and plant-source proteins; whenever possible, avoid using single-use tableware and serve-ware and if that's not possible, prioritise compostable products while securing a way to compost them; promote the drinking of tap water to the festival audience and raise awareness about on-site water availability.

### **TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT**

Travel-related emissions are another part of the festival carbon footprint that can never be fully eliminated: the presence of international guests is crucial for the success of film festivals, on one hand because of their interactions with the local audience, but also because film festivals provide vital points for the building of the European and global film community.

The questions aimed to analyse what sustainability measures are implemented in the area of travel and transport: notably the data on transportation methods of the international guests, monitoring the travel-related footprint, promoting public transport usage or ensuring accommodations align with sustainability goals. The study seeks to identify how the Doc Alliance festivals mitigate their environmental impact while facilitating attendee access.

## **FIRSTLY, THE FESTIVALS WERE ASKED TO PROVIDE THE NUMBER OF GUESTS THEY INVITED PAYING FOR THEIR FLIGHTS AND TRAIN/BUS JOURNEYS.**

As the sizes of Doc Alliance festivals differ, so do the numbers of invited film and industry guests. The number of flights bought by the festivals ranges from 40 to 185, demonstrating visibly the difference of size but also of geographical location: festivals more accessible by land transport show a significantly higher ratio of guests invited by land transport (such as FIDMarseille or Millennium Docs Against Gravity).

While it is important to take into consideration these geographical specificities, it is also crucial for all the festivals to implement sustainable policies for guest travel, such as rules on what is the minimum distance in kms or the maximum travel time by land transport to justify a flight. For example, DOK Leipzig has set a clear limit on prioritising land transport over flights: they automatically choose the train if the travel time is under 8 hours.

## **IT WAS IMPORATANT ALSO TO CONSIDER THE MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION USED TO GET FESTIVAL GUESTS FROM/TO THE AIRPORT?**

As with festival accessibility by land travel, the distance of airports to Doc Alliance festival venues also varies (from 4 km to 148 km to the nearest airport). This survey shows that a vast majority of Doc Alliance festivals already implements satisfactory measures when it comes to transportation of guests on site, such as: using electric cars, either rented or obtained through sustainable partnerships; using public transport (train, bus, metro) for guest airport transfer and only using cars when necessary. One example of good practice, is CPH:DOX that buys metro tickets for the people the festival

invites and urges guests in all other forms of communication to use public transportation.

## **ANOTHER IMPORTANT AREA OF RESEARCH WAS ABOUT HOW THE FESTIVALS PROMOTE THE USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE A PARTNERSHIP WITH A LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICE PROVIDER.**

- CPH:DOX regularly partners up with local bike sharing companies, despite the venues being in walkable distance or the most easily reached by metro. The usage of public transport is promoted in the printed festival newspaper and on the website.
- Doclisboa offers monthly passes to guests for using public bikes. They encourage the guests to walk and use public transportation in their guest book.
- The venues of DOK Leipzig are at walking distance, but the festival established a partnership with Nextbike shared bikes and allows the accredited guests to rent it for free for 120 minutes. The festival has also been striving for a partnership with local public transport for a long time, but the costs for free transport exceed the budgetary limitations.
- The strategy of FIDMarseille is to locate all the venues (cinemas, partner venues for evening program and professional meetings) into a very tight “hyper-centre” of Marseille within a walkable radius. On the opening night, the festival provides buses from the old port to the Silvain theatre to encourage people to use public transport.

- Ji.hlava lets the guests know about their environmental policy and green transport initiatives in pre-festival communication (website, social media, program brochure). The festival collaborates with Nextbike to provide shared bikes for the festival guests – thanks to this collaboration, shared bikes were introduced to the city of Jihlava, so the environmental strategies have broader community impact. Although all the venues are walking distance, Ji.hlava established a partnership with the city’s public transport so that people can get from/to their accommodation easily: with a festival badge, the public can use it for free. This information is also communicated online and onsite (for example at the accreditation centre).
- Millennium Docs Against Gravity also ensures a walkable festival and encourages the public to use public transport when necessary. If the festival guests are required to attend an event in a non-walkable venue, they are transported by festival cars.
- Visions du Réel – since Nyon is a small city, all festival venues are walkable. The visitors also use public buses, which are free for accommodated guests since 2024.

**ANOTHER QUESTION CONSIDERED WAS WHETHER THE FESTIVALS HAVE IMPLEMENTED A SURVEY FOR AMONG THEIR AUDIENCE TO RESEARCH THEIR SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES (ACCOMMODATION, TRANSPORTATION, WASTE, ETC).**

Most of the Doc Alliance festivals have not implemented an audience survey inquiring about their sustainability practices yet, although some of them are planning to do so at the next editions. Ji.hlava has been collecting data for a few years, but the festival only collects data for transportation (how the visitors get to and from

the festival). However, filling the survey is voluntary, so the festival does not obtain enough relevant data to make conclusions on visitors behaviour. Some of the reasons making it difficult for the festivals to implement such a questionnaire are as follows: motivating people to spend time answering such a survey is not easy; there are human resources needed to analyse such a survey which the festivals don’t have; festivals are focusing on other sustainability strategies with a greater impact.

**ANOTHER QUESTION ASKED WAS WHETHER FESTIVALS OFFER THE OPTION OF “VISITING” THEM BOTH FOR THE FILM AND THE INDUSTRY PROGRAMMES ONLINE (STREAMING, VOD)?**

As a response to the pandemic, all Doc Alliance festivals were pushed to experiment with online versions of their events in the past few years. However, not all of them see it as an effective way to conduct their program and most prefer physical presence of guests and speakers. Although having an online version of the festival seems plausible in terms of environmental sustainability, it may not always be the case. As one festival writes:

**“IN 2022, WE TRIED ALLOWING PARTICIPANTS TO FOLLOW THE FESTIVAL ONLINE, HOWEVER, ATTENDANCE WAS VERY LOW. THEREFORE, WE CALCULATED THAT THE IMPRINT OF HAVING FEW ATTENDEES ONLINE DIDN’T WEIGH UP FOR THE IMPRINT OF THE TECHNICAL PRODUCTION NECESSARY FOR STREAMING THE EVENTS.”**

Recording industry events can therefore be too financially, technologically, and in the end also environmentally costly for the impact it has. Nevertheless, all Doc Alliance festivals offer the opportunity to watch films on VOD for the audiences and/or the decision makers – this online version of the festival usually starts after the festival finishes.

## **LASTLY, THE FESTIVALS WERE ASKED IF THEY USE HOTELS WITH ECO-CERTIFICATES FOR THE GUESTS.**

Three Doc Alliance festivals are using hotels with eco-certification. For those that are not doing so, the most common problems are: choosing the hotels based on costs; some festivals are taking place at small cities, and are not able to choose among hotels – they choose all of them; eco-certification for hotels is more common in some parts of Europe than in others.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the festivals' answers, it would be beneficial to focus on the following strategies: create a sustainable transport policy which prioritises low carbon travel with clear rules on what is the benchmark for purchasing flights (e.g. if land travel is below 8 hours, it will be prioritised); communicate your sustainability practices regarding travel and transport with your guests and audiences clearly; if possible, conduct audience surveys to learn where your audience comes from and what means of travel they use to get to the festival.

## **COMMUNITY**

The last part of this survey aims to monitor all activities that the Doc Alliance festivals are doing that contribute to educating and building awareness to create a sustainable documentary community with a common goal: protecting the environment. These are the impactful strategies that last even when the festival finishes and can inspire broad audiences to a change. Such activities can be a part of the festival program: screening and

awarding films dealing with ecology-related themes or programming inspiring discussions with people on sustainable topics. Moreover, it is also important for the festivals themselves to be active members of the community and share their good practices and problem areas with others.

## **FIRSTLY, THE FESTIVALS WERE ASKED IF THEY OFFER AN INDUSTRY PROGRAMME DEALING WITH THE IDEAS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (WORKSHOPS, PANEL DEBATES, MASTERCLASSES).**

Naturally, since the Doc Alliance festivals focus on the documentary format, all of them screen films dealing with issues of environmental sustainability or nature protection – some of them not just as a natural part of the selection, but through direct initiatives. Among such examples is MDAG programming a film section titled Climate for Change dedicated to documentaries focusing on the environment.

Apart from film program, multiple Doc Alliance festivals offer inspiring industry program with panel discussions and masterclasses. As part of these events, festivals often contextualise sustainability within film industry: for example, Doclisboa offers such program systematically (some examples from the past few editions: masterclass for producers on green shooting, debate on the Green New Deal, workshops for children about the sea, or a debate on the links between Film and Sustainability). Whilst CPH:DOX, presented conversations curated by Climate Story Lab Nordic around climate storytelling leading to meaningful actions in 2024.

Ji.hlava IDFF has a whole accompanying program section called the Inspiration Forum which strives to be a platform for thinking about the contemporary world. As part of the Forum, there are discussions dealing

with sustainability programmed continuously: such as ones about degrowth, drought, climate crisis, sustainability of the textile industry etc. They also make recordings of some of the discussions so that they can be shared and watched by larger audiences.

### **THE SECOND QUESTION IN THIS AREA WAS WHETHER THE FESTIVALS ARE ACTIVELY SHARING GOOD PRACTICES REGARDING SUSTAINABILITY WITH OTHER FESTIVALS.**

The most significant sharing among festivals is done through the Doc Alliance Network. Apart from the Doc Alliance Network, some of the festivals are also actively sharing their knowledge regarding sustainability in other networks:

Doclisboa is a signatory of the Green Charter for Film Festivals, an initiative striving for monitoring of carbon gas emissions produced by festival organisation.

FIDMarseille is a member of COFEES network: a collective of eco-responsible festivals in the southern region. Membership of this collective enables the permanent team to follow training courses throughout the year on a variety of subjects, in order to share best practice and improve the eco-responsibility measures they put in place.

Visions du Réel regularly communicates this with other Swiss festivals.

### **LASTLY, THE FESTIVALS WERE ASKED IF THERE IS SOME SPECIAL ACTIVITY THEY DO, FOR EXAMPLE, TREE-PLANTING, WORK WITH COMMUNITY, NATURE WALKS, OR AN ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD:**

The trophy of Doclisboa Awards is produced from seashells that are offered by a restaurant supplier. Whilst the festival facilities of FIDMarseille, in the heart of Marseille, have a garden in which no pesticides are used. Plum trees and fig trees grow there and are accessible to the festival team. This garden, which is used all year round by the festival team, and during the festival for the FIDLab meetings, is a green haven and is a part of the festival's identity.

In 2019, Ji.hlava IDFF planted 23 fruit trees in an orchard in Jihlava for every year the festival took place. Since then, the festival has planted another tree there every year. Whereas, Millennium Docs Against Gravity gives an environmental award – Green Warsaw Award – to the best documentary on ecology and the environment. One of the patrons of the festival in WWF Poland, which organises debates, promotes films etc. MDAG also cooperates with organisations such as Greenpeace and Youth for Climate. Every year, there is at least one debate on climate change. In addition, MDAG runs workshops, for example they did one on up-cycling of clothes.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Doc Alliance festivals are actively contributing to building a sustainable documentary community through a variety of impactful practices that extend beyond the festival itself. They screen films that address environmental sustainability, and host industry programs featuring workshops and discussions that contextualise sustainability within the film industry.

The sharing of best practices among festivals is also facilitated through the Doc Alliance Network, which promotes collaboration and exchange. Furthermore, they facilitate various activities that help build awareness around sustainable practices. Notable sustainability efforts include tree-planting initiatives and awarding eco-friendly films, further integrating community engagement with environmental protection. These collective efforts not only educate audiences but also inspire broader societal change towards sustainability, reinforcing the role of festivals as active community members committed to environmental stewardship.

To strengthen these communal practices further, the following can be considered: finding ways of implementing sustainability themes into festival activities that popularise environmental efforts and build awareness; reaching out to local NGOs dealing with environmental protection and biodiversity to discuss the environmental impact of festivals and consult sustainability practices, as well as to engage them to give talks/workshops about local wildlife and the programmes they are running.

Sona Karapoghosian on  
**FESTIVALS AS ENGINES OF INCLUSION  
AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT**



At the European Film Market 2026, representatives of DocAlliance and the Network of Festivals of the Adriatic Region came together for a roundtable discussion on the role of festivals in fostering inclusion and talent development. In light of further political escalations, such cultural initiatives serve not only as individual exhibition platforms but also as interconnected ecosystems that shape cultural circulation, professional pathways, and audience access across Europe and beyond. Moderated by Dominic Willson, the Executive Director of the International Documentary Association (IDA) the discussion brought together perspectives from across the regions, with each speaker reflecting on their experience and presenting the initiatives and practices they implement at their festivals.

The conversation began with a presentation of the two networks. Asja Krsmanović, the head of CinemaLink (Sarajevo IFF), explained that the Network of Festivals of the Adriatic Region is built on three pillars, with programming being the most central. In addition to supporting each other on a technical level—for example by sharing translated subtitles and other resources, as the countries share closely related languages—the festivals also collaborate on joint programming. Although the festivals within the network differ in scale, funding resources, and even target groups, they share a common geographical focus on the Adriatic Region. Their representatives therefore work together to establish programs with different focuses, for example on European cinema. Talent development, however, follows a slightly different approach. The network has created and continues to collaborate on industry initiatives that give a voice to emerging filmmakers, often students from the region who are in the process of developing their projects. Anastasiia Kleshchenko (FIDMarseille) also offered a brief presentation of DocAlliance as a network of seven documentary festivals, highlighting the geographical diversity already present within the group. The Alliance, which initially came together with the aim of supporting emerging talent by awarding two annual prizes for Best Feature and Best Short Documentary, has further expanded its vision of diversity and inclusion with the introduction of the concept of a guest festival. In recent years, the network has welcomed DokuFest (Kosovo), Docudays UA (Ukraine), Punto de Vista International Documentary Film Festival (Spain), and this year Golden Apricot International Film Festival (Armenia).

Diversity and inclusion at festivals were discussed on several levels. Some festivals, which have been running for several decades, noted that the idea of inclusion has evolved significantly over the years, and that there is a constant need to reassess both their understanding of it and the activities

through which it is addressed. Helder Beja, the festival director of DocLisboa IFF, emphasized that the mission of the festival has always been to consider which underrepresented groups are included, both geographically and socially. Over the past ten years, the festival has become an important gateway for Latin American films to the European film market, a role that also extends to the industry. Through industry initiatives, residency programs, and labs, the festival seeks to nurture talent—from emerging filmmakers in Portugal to filmmakers from abroad, including those from across the ocean. Karol Piekarczyk, the Artistic Director of Millennium Docs Against Gravity, shared their approach to diversity not only from the perspective of programming but also in terms of audience inclusion. Running a festival across seven cities in Poland, the festival has made significant progress toward this goal—for example, reaching an audience of 180,000 in 2025, all of whom watched the films in cinemas.

For the Golden Apricot International Film Festival, Sona Karapoghosyan explained the role of the festival as a hub for filmmakers from the Western Asia region. In light of political escalations in neighboring countries and ongoing challenges to freedom of speech and human rights, the festival seeks to provide a safe platform for these filmmakers to present their projects and films. Nadja Tennstedt, Head of Industry at DOK Leipzig, further emphasized the role of festivals in creating safe spaces for artistic expression, not only within specific regions but across Europe more broadly, and in supporting artists to resist violations of their rights. She highlighted experiences from the most recent edition of the festival, where Georgian and Hungarian filmmakers participated in panels to share how they mobilize, organize protests, and fight back against oppression.

In the case of Visions du Réel, the program of inclusivity was initially promoted by the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had created a list of countries from which the festival should annually include at least one delegation. However, Emilie Bujès, the Artistic Director of the festival, decided not to follow these prescriptive measures, which she believed would be less effective. Instead, her team integrated the concept of inclusivity and diversity directly into the program, ensuring that filmmakers from different regions were represented across the festival's screenings and initiatives, with particular attention to emerging filmmakers. As most of these participants are attending an international film festival for the first time, they are also offered special guidance, including tailored informational packages, meetings with producers and funding bodies, and support to navigate the international film circuit more broadly.

The diversity of filmmaking forms was addressed by Mara Gourd-Mercado, Head of Industry at CPH:DOX. In Copenhagen, the festival is committed to broadening the horizons and perspectives of its audiences through films and diverse forms of expression. In parallel with its interactive exhibitions, the festival offers an initiative called CPH Lab, designed to teach immersive and interactive storytelling. Gourd-Mercado believes that XR and immersive works create a space that allows greater freedom to explore documentary language in ways that are not commonly seen in linear documentaries.

The conversation also addressed the topic of festival networks and their importance. Marek Hovorka, the festival director of Ji.hlava IDFF, noted that in light of rapid technological developments, the problem of overproduction, and the transformation of the cinema form due to its high accessibility, sharing experiences within networks has become crucial. Being aware of how other

festivals tackle common challenges—or collaborating on solutions—makes the process far more productive and efficient. At the same time, festival networks provide additional opportunities for funding through the Creative Europe program. The Network of Festivals of the Adriatic Region was created to offer mutual support, particularly for festivals in countries where European funding schemes are less accessible. Collaboration between networks adds further value, as it allows festivals to reach out to one another to gain insights about specific geographical regions with which they may be less familiar.

During the second part of the discussion, the conversation was opened to the public, who raised several important issues. The first concerned the challenges faced by filmmakers from developing countries. Often they do not speak the language, and it can be difficult for them to complete lengthy applications or pitch their projects in order to receive funding. The second point addressed the question of content. The speaker noted that filmmakers are often expected to address particular topics in their films and may risk not being selected by festivals if their work does not meet these expectations. In response, some of the festival representatives explained that they have begun working with bilingual translators who assist filmmakers throughout their festival experience. In addition, Mara Gourd–Mercado acknowledged the systemic barriers many filmmakers face, as well as the challenges encountered by festival programmers. She noted that Western programmers may sometimes struggle to fully understand certain storytelling approaches or cultural contexts. To address this, the festival collaborates with local consultants who provide deeper insight into the context of the films and help programmers question their own perspectives and filters when selecting works.

Another question raised during the discussion concerned the challenges that young filmmakers, particularly those from minority groups—such as Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQI+ communities—may face when attending major festivals in Europe. There have been known cases of microaggressions, as well as situations in which industry professionals providing consultations are not sufficiently familiar with these kinds of stories. As a result, their comments may sometimes appear insensitive or even offensive. The question therefore addressed whether festival management undertakes preparatory work with staff members and invited professionals in advance to ensure greater awareness and sensitivity in these interactions. In response, Marina Thomé, the Head of Industry at DocLisboa, shared the festival’s experience, noting that both its festival and industry activities regularly work with young filmmakers and artists, particularly from Latin America. In addition to holding meetings with the festival’s Guest Department to discuss and anticipate potential issues that may arise due to language barriers or cultural differences, the market has also introduced several structural changes. For example, instead of the classic pitching formats—which can be challenging for young filmmakers—the festival has opted for moderated conversation formats, usually led by Latin American professionals who are more familiar with the cultural context. However, this approach also brings financial challenges. Funding schemes for festivals are often designed to support the participation of professionals from Europe, making it difficult to secure support for mentors and experts from other regions. In this regard, the lack of assistance from embassies can leave festivals in particularly challenging positions.

Another question from the audience addressed potential collaborations with institutions that could provide mental health support for filmmakers, ensuring that professional assistance is available when needed. Dominic Willsdon

noted that although the organization does not run festivals, it recognizes the importance of mental health support within the film industry. He highlighted their collaboration with Film in Mind, an initiative that provides therapeutic support for film industry professionals. Hélder Beja also mentioned that although they have not yet implemented specific mental health mentorship programs at DocLisboa, the festival organized a workshop a year ago on harassment and abuse for the entire team. As the festival relies on a large temporary staff that works together for only a few months before the event, it is important to address questions of work ethics and clarify what is acceptable within the working environment. While the festival currently does not have sufficient budget to provide on-site professional support or formal mental health mentorship, the team plans to continue organizing workshops and to further explore possibilities for stronger mental health support in the future. Representatives of Ji.hlava IDFF and Millennium Docs Against Gravity also shared their experiences. During their festivals, they provide a dedicated call service—primarily for staff members—through which individuals can receive mental health support if needed. Millennium Docs Against Gravity additionally offers this service to audiences, reflecting the festival’s strong audience-oriented approach and its awareness of the often sensitive topics addressed in the films it screens. However, as there have been incidents involving festival guests in the past, the presence of a mental health professional on site is increasingly seen as an important step toward ensuring the well-being of everyone attending the festival.

The concluding question from the audience addressed the responsibility of festivals regarding sustainability and the environment. As festivals grow—organizing more events, inviting more films and professionals, and requiring travel by plane or train—they can have a significant environmental impact.

In response, Emilie Bujès suggested that a truly effective solution would require a radical, collective decision by all festivals to reduce the number of industry guests and filmmakers. If only one festival took such a step, she explained, it would risk becoming smaller and weaker. Moving activities online has also proven inefficient, as it significantly impacts the film industry. Therefore, the practical measures left include reducing the use of single-use plastics, printing fewer catalogues, or eliminating meat from festival events. Asja Krsmanović offered another perspective, noting that in a small city like Sarajevo, the festival functions as an economic engine, attracting more than 100,000 guests each year.

The conversation concluded with a light-hearted remark from the moderator, who joked that, as an American, he was envious of the European context—where, despite all the challenges, festivals continue to create opportunities to exchange, collaborate, and support filmmakers.



**CPH:DOX**

**DOC  
LISBOA**  
International  
Film Festival

**DOX** Leipzig

**FID MARSEILLE  
INTERNATIONAL FILM  
FESTIVAL**

**Ji hlava**  
International  
Documentary  
Film Festival

Millennium  
**DOCS  
AGAINST  
GRAVITY**

**Visions  
du Reel**



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