Transcript Audience Discussion / Consensus in Film – Opening Event on 25 Oct 2025

Uwe Lübbermann:
So, dear people, the already extended break is now over, and we'd like to continue. From experience, it always takes a moment with you—which is actually a good thing; you don't immediately listen to the hierarchy speaking from the stage. That's why I'll come down to you. In this part, we'd really like to start a conversation. The great presentations from this morning honestly impressed me a lot, and what you may already have heard from me, we now want to transfer to the film industry. We've collected a few guiding questions as a backup, but really, it's your turn now—at the microphone. Who would like to say something or ask a question? I'll deliberately wait until it really hurts. Or put differently: Are there people among you who say, "Yes, these are all nice ideas we've heard, but in practice this won't work for us"? And if so, why? This isn't about concrete questions yet—it's first and foremost about you, your thoughts and questions.

Participant A:
Well, we're a small group here and assume we'll reach agreement. But it could also be that some people simply don't bring this attitude with them. How do you deal with that?

Uwe Lübbermann:
In hierarchical structures, nothing works without the willingness of the upper levels to participate. If that willingness isn't there on its own, you have to make it appealing to them. My strategy so far has been more of an approach via small areas. I try to design a small area in such a way that, through better involvement of everyone and through consensus-based decisions, things run more efficiently. Then I show this to the decision-makers: "Look, we processed 300,000 purchasing data points in half a year—that wouldn't have been possible otherwise." Ultimately, it's about making the benefits visible to the people who decide. The concrete implementation and how to package it politely is another question. But the point is to communicate the advantages.
Are there any other questions or ideas that you consider possible in the film industry, or that you may already have seen?

Felix Fischl:
I'd like to follow up directly, because I find the question very interesting. We could gather different opinions or collect suggestions. It comes down to a crucial point: How do we convince decision-makers? How do we argue not only in terms of content, but also strategically—together?
So what options come to mind? I'd like to use the group to collect these. I think you don't do this alone, but build a certain group strength.
Uwe, maybe you could also bring in your experience and show us what exists in practice. I think it's important that we discuss both strategies and concrete possibilities.

Emina Smajic:
In my presentation earlier, I mentioned that the university advisory board was abolished by the FDP and CDU—probably to spite those they like to label as "left-green woke." At the same time, a quota of 30% was introduced—really, it would have to be higher to include everyone intersectionally.
If you go to 50%, many people would have to voluntarily give up their positions, train someone else, and thus enable, for example, a female editor or a head of a broadcaster. Politically, that would have to be mandatory.
Is there a veto? The film industry is an area where money flows and decisions are made. Exactly

here, there has to be a turning point. If we were to think really radically for once, in order to truly change something, intersectional editorial teams would have to emerge. And that only works if there is a radical exchange at some point, or if, after retirements, people from intersectional backgrounds are trained.

Participant B:
Film is, on the one hand, culture, but on the other hand it's also viewed economically. And that's the problem: film doesn't have the same cultural depth as, for example, theater. But if you look at the economic aspect, you have to see that the groups being addressed are also markets. Just as society is aging while films are often aimed at young people or coming-of-age stories—I've experienced festivals where the audience consisted almost entirely of older people—structures have to be adapted to the population. That's the only way it works: if products are made for certain groups, people from those groups who know the needs should also be involved.

Uwe Lübbermann:
I have to smile a bit, because I'm thinking of a group at the university: Johannes, Christian, Jonathan, and Frank, all in their mid-twenties, all business administration students, who set up a project together—and how well that worked!
We heard a positive example during the break where quite a few things are already working better—you can definitely point to that.

Philipp Mehler:
For example, a film project by Laura Fischer (*Für immer Freibad*, Germany 2024), which she presented in a panel. They really thought things through together with everyone involved: "What do you need?" They worked in a somewhat less hierarchical way and implemented the shoot with only four shooting days per week.
The experience was that everything ran much faster, because everyone was able to communicate their concerns, problems, and limitations beforehand. As a result, the shoot ran more smoothly without the quality of the film suffering.
Coordination was better, people took more responsibility for their areas and voiced their concerns. The director pitched in herself and was always approachable. In the end, it felt like a family—but the way of working was more efficient, in less time, and not more expensive.
So there are definitely positive examples. They just need to be made more widely known within the industry. Perhaps it was also a special combination of characters: everyone was willing to listen, and that moved the project forward. If decision-makers see that it also works economically, such an approach can spread. It can't be transferred one-to-one to Netflix or other large productions, but it works on a small scale, and from there it can grow.

Belinde Ruth Stieve:
I'm not entirely sure, because this is getting a bit scattered, but I'll refer back to an example again. There are many positive examples—no matter the topic, you can always find something. For instance, you can look at how films are made in Denmark. There are many positive approaches there: eight-hour shooting days—but that doesn't just mean camera time, it really means eight hours of filming. Still, they have the same number of shooting days as in Germany, work with smaller crews, use technology more efficiently—and Danish films are not worse than German ones.
You can find examples everywhere, including in Germany. The real question is: How can such approaches be transferred to more productions? How can pressure be applied so that the composition behind the camera or in production companies changes? It's hard to regulate this by law: you can't just say, "From now on, only hire people with a migration background."

You have to work toward openness. One example: a lot has changed with *Tatort*. There have repeatedly been female detectives. That shows that something is slowly moving. A quota is hard to implement because *Tatort* productions are decentralized. That's why I think it's better to use small levers where everyone has to contribute, rather than forcing something.
My proposal: When publicly funded productions are made—whether through funding or public broadcasters—directing, screenplay, camera, sound, editing, and music should each include at least one woman. This way, responsibility is distributed to each production, and a measurable effect is created. Even then, we won't reach 50% women, but it's a step. It's about initiating many small changes that add up, instead of waiting for one big law.

Emina Smajic:
I really like to dream, and my dream would have been that new talent had to be selected editorially. So far, productions have to bear this responsibility. Then the production is always the "bad guy" when there isn't enough diversity again, and the burden rests solely on their shoulders. Instead, we should start where decisions are actually made: in the editorial departments, whether at streamers or public broadcasters.
My experience shows that it's often very difficult to talk to the people there. I myself was in editorial departments, and I know how they talk about us—it was shocking. At first I thought, "I want to become an editor, I can change something." But when I got to know the people, I thought, "I can't do this, I can't work here."
That's why I believe: if you really want to change something, you have to loosen structures and have people around you who can exert influence—who don't feel alone, who don't have to shout loudly until they eventually lose their voices, and who stay motivated. In my opinion, there's no other way than to introduce quotas. For example, 6 to 2 or 4 to 2—that's actually still too little, but at least it's an approach. And you have to start at the top, with the decision-makers.

Belinde Ruth Stieve:
Just a quick addition: it's 2 to 6. I don't think I said 3 to 6, because, for example, only 25% of camera trainees are women—that's more like 2 out of 6. If you were to demand 50%, there wouldn't yet be enough women who could do it.
I completely agree with you. I just wanted to briefly mention a positive editorial team: *ZDF Das kleine Fernsehspiel*. They were among the first to invite me to discuss my ideas. I was able to explain how I see projects, and I was met with openness—that was really pleasant. So there are different kinds of editorial teams.
I remember an editor to whom I suggested myself for a role as a nurse. She said, "That's not what a nurse looks like." Of course not because she would have had to look like me, but because a TV nurse looks different in her imagination. In real life, though, if I had been an actress, I would at least have portrayed a nurse as I had seen her. That's a small example of how rigid ideas influence casting.

Sophia Igel:
What I'd be really interested in is this: we're talking a lot now about what we observe within the existing system. But I'm also interested in comparing two approaches side by side—on the one hand, changing the system from within, within the existing framework, and on the other hand, founding something completely new, where the structures aren't yet fixed and you start from scratch.
If we transfer this to the image of a floor plan: in the existing system, there are many "rooms" that already exist, and in the new approach, you could design these rooms differently or merge them. Your experience with such approaches would really interest me.

Uwe Lübbermann:
Both, I'd say. Both approaches are valuable and important if we want to achieve major change. To do that, we need not just one path, but several.
I also see an opportunity here through the network that has been built. We exchange ideas through moments like this face-to-face conversation. By the way, it strikes me that my wife, who is a trained TV journalist, left the industry because of the poor treatment of young women. Such experiences have to be collected and communicated together.
But the positive examples we hear here also have to be collected and communicated in order to make a different approach attractive. For me, then, it's not either/or—it's both together that matter.

Alexander Bauer:
Hello, first of all. My name is Alexander Bauer, I'm a spokesperson on the advisory council for people with disabilities. I'm not very familiar with the film sector, but I'd still like to contribute a few points. What matters to me is that the conditions have to be right for me, as a disabled person, to be able to participate in film at all.
That means schools have to be accessible, actresses have to be able to work barrier-free, toilets and locations have to be accessible, stages have to be reachable, and so on. There are many different hurdles and barriers that make working difficult.
Another example we've already heard is Deutsche Bahn: it's not always easy to get somewhere, whether by bus or train. I remember discussions with bus drivers who didn't want to take me, didn't want to extend the ramp, or where I had to wait for the next bus because the first one was full.
These obstacles lead to constant strain for people with disabilities—physically, health-wise, and organizationally. If you still want to work, you have to find a way to manage all of that.
I also don't always want to play roles that portray me as disabled or reduce me to a specific limitation. It would be important for us to also get roles in which we appear as heroes or heroines, as special personalities who achieve something great. Role models are often lacking, and there have to be more opportunities so that people feel comfortable in this field and become visible.

Felix Fischl:
I'd like to follow up once more with a brief question directed at Jonas—very briefly, but clearly: there are indeed positive cases of inclusion in various departments. That shows it's possible. Perhaps you could name a few concrete examples to show how this can be implemented.

Jonas Karpa:
There aren't many consistently positive examples. But I want to emphasize again: to really change something, we need people who currently hold positions of power. They have to be willing to give up their place, to stand up, and to drive change. My experience from our group, which is often marginalized, shows: we can try as hard as we want—little happens as long as people in committees or production companies don't support these changes and become allies.
That's an important point where I myself often waver: how loud does my activism have to be? How much do I need to draw attention to myself, and how constructive should I be? Of course, constructivism can't always achieve everything, but we definitely need allies who change the system and thus make room for us so that we can continue to shape things ourselves.
There are positive examples from time to time. I'm always glad when requests for consultation come in. What's often missing is a sense of normalcy in production companies—for example: on *Tatort*, police procedures are routinely trained to ensure authenticity, just as real doctors are

involved in hospital series. This expertise has to be consulted. It's used temporarily, but unfortunately not integrated across the board.
My advice: if productions are set up more diversely, much of this expertise would have to be brought in from outside. It already exists, but it hasn't yet been implemented systematically.

Uwe Lübbermann:
I'd like to briefly take a look into the future. When we look at the screen, it still says "Barriers"—that describes the current situation. But I imagine that in half a year, a well-filled server with information will be sent to decision-makers so that they can educate themselves better than they can now. That could help them become more competent decision-makers. Just a thought for the future.

Jörg Geißler:
Thank you. I'm Jörg Geißler, a cinematographer, now 70 years old, and I worked in the profession for a long time. There are many young colleagues who are talented and are now being asked first. I remember my first day on a film production in 1977. One of my first concerns was to apply for membership in my union. At the time, there was only a small union, the Radio-Television-Film Union, which later merged with IG Druck und Papier to form IG Medien.
In IG Medien, I had the dubious pleasure of sitting opposite producers for twelve years who were very tough and showed little willingness to think about union concerns. Anything that might cost even a penny more was rejected. I experienced full-time union secretaries putting pressure on film workers and blocking collective bargaining demands, such as the 13th hour on set.
Today, 25 years later, I'm glad to see that current collective bargaining commissions have finally enforced changes, such as the abolition of the 13th hour. This is not only important for inclusive work, but also for creating humane working conditions in film production.
I began my career as a camera assistant and later became a cinematographer and lecturer—a great job internationally. But it must not be forgotten that film is a serious profession and requires fair working conditions. I'm positively surprised by this discussion today, because we're talking about such topics, but we must also continue to be engaged—whether through unions or political organizations—to have an impact on society.
As an old man, I don't believe I'll still live to see working hours in Germany become as family-friendly as in Ireland or France. But I want to encourage you: you are young—don't stop working for change, even if the conditions are difficult. Don't let yourselves be discouraged, even when there are political setbacks.

Sina Nickl:
I have another question for the group. I'm currently working on a graduation film project in which we want to implement a barrier-free production. Compared to all of you, we're probably not in the business for very long yet, but we keep running into problems. Budget is of course a factor, but there are also practical challenges: for example, for people in wheelchairs or those who have difficulty walking, it's often almost impossible to participate.
I wonder whether it's actually possible to implement truly barrier-free work in the various departments. After all, there are legal requirements that are supposed to ensure participation for people with disabilities. And yet, in the film industry, I keep experiencing that it's almost impossible to work without barriers.

Emina Smajic:
I shot my graduation film in 2021. In our ensemble, there was also the younger brother of our lead, who has a disability. For us, it was essential that a child with a disability be cast. There was no question of solving it any other way, and the search for this boy took a very, very long time.
I don't know if anyone has already said this, but we cast for a year and a half to make all of this

possible. Eventually, we went through a Kurdish association that is active nationwide in relevant meetings and found an eight- or nine-year-old boy in Berlin.
We then realized how difficult it is to coordinate everything. Some apartments were on the second floor, and we adapted the story accordingly. There's a scene in which the main character carries her brother downstairs every day and takes him on her shoulders to the bus that then picks him up—simply to briefly show reality.
That was only possible because the child himself has a brother with a disability. As a producer, this was essential for me. Together as a unit, we managed to shoot everything in a way that was feasible. It was also a graduation production. I feel that these productions are often the most progressive. I wish they had more budget, but otherwise I think it's great that you're doing this. Everything is possible—you just really have to want it.

Jonas Karpa:
There are so many different possibilities. For example, the filming location has to be accessible if you want to set up an inclusive team. In a work context, there are often companies that say, "We can't hire people with disabilities because we don't have an elevator."
But disability is diverse. Blind people don't need an elevator and can also use stairs. So you have to take the diversity of disabilities into account. If you focus only on wheelchair accessibility, other aspects are overlooked.
Accessibility also concerns communication. For example, in film: Tobias Lehmann is deaf and works as a cinematographer. If you design a film to be accessible, you can take his needs into account, for instance by using sign language.
Another example is an Austrian documentary about the flood disaster in which many people with disabilities drowned in care homes because they were not warned or rescued in time. An accessible version of the film was produced: instead of an additional audio description, the two people guiding the film briefly explain in each scene where they are and what the surroundings look like. This way, no extra audio track is needed.
When it comes to accessibility, you have to consider the diversity of disabilities and address different barriers in different ways.

Uwe Lübbermann:
If no one else has anything to add, I'd like to bring in an outside perspective—which may be why I was invited today. During the preparation and throughout today, one main problem stood out to me: apparently, there are many poor leaders in this industry.
The question is: how can they be enabled, or what does it actually mean to be a good leader? In my view, good leadership first and foremost means creating psychological safety. Personal characteristics, including disabilities, should not be a problem in this context.
I've learned that there is often a great deal of pressure in the industry to work without mistakes. One example: at the Busan Festival, I'm regularly responsible for beverage logistics—one thousand tons of drinks have to be moved reliably. There, the message was clear: "We'll manage this together." That creates safety and relaxation, which leads to fewer mistakes.
Psychological safety is therefore the first leadership task. If it doesn't succeed, the other tasks are hardly possible.
The next point is clear orientation: Where is the project heading? How do we want to work? Openness toward a wide variety of people, clear rules and processes—this all has to be communicated to everyone involved. This creates a framework within which people can work freely. Shooting days are fixed, but certain processes can be discussed in advance so they don't feel externally imposed and can better match the participants' needs.
The final point concerns formal hierarchy: if something goes wrong, if someone steals something or harassment occurs, one person has to make decisions, such as removing

someone from the project. This formal hierarchy should only come into play where it is truly necessary.
That was a brief description of good leadership: creating psychological safety, providing orientation, and using formal hierarchy selectively. It's actually not that hard—if you understand it.
I have the impression that many leaders in your industry don't understand this approach. The question remains: how do we reach them?

Felix Fischl:
I think that fits perfectly. What I wanted to say, I was happy to leave to Felix, because through that I learned that exactly such a production exists in the emerging talent sector—a project that gathers and implements practical experience.
I think this is very, very important. I completely agree with him: the younger generation is called upon. Not only because it brings a different mindset, but also because it can try out new things in education and training.
Such projects offer a safe space—I'd say similar to what film universities make possible—to practically test things. This is crucial in order to persuade an industry that otherwise allows hardly any mistakes.
If you bring practical experience, you can show: "It actually works." Just as Hans successfully implemented it earlier. You can no longer simply claim that something doesn't work.
I just want to encourage you: I think it's great that you found your way here. At the same time, we want to get involved in the area of further training. I don't want to overpromise, but we could be a place to experiment with, for example, how to organize job allocations or which communication tools are needed so that everything works better from the start.
We want to offer a platform to practically test such approaches and learn from one another.

Uwe Lübbermann:
Are there any further contributions?

Harry Haarstark:
I'd like to agree with Felix. It should simply be ensured through quota regulations within film crews that specialists come together and that these films can also be produced successfully. I'd also like to put in a good word for German film. Since 1933, a lot has been destroyed, and I think our only chance is to work on a European level—that is, to collaborate internationally and produce successful films. I'm not only thinking of documentaries, but also of feature film productions, which are hardly being made in Germany anymore.
If we want to hold our own against the dominance of America, China, or India, we have to cooperate with other European nations and bring specialists together. It can't be that, for example, you have to hire a colleague in France because the European driver's license or recognition is still unclear. Qualified personnel should be available, and borders must not prevent exchange.
That's why I strongly advocate for international cooperation and for taking into account the different possibilities and abilities of people. Frankfurt is a good example: the city has always been internationally shaped, whether through the Frankfurt Book Fair or buildings like the cathedral, which was only possible through cooperation with other countries.

Felix Fischl:
I'd like to direct another question to Minna, since she's already been mentioned. You've accompanied Muslim female filmmakers in workshops, and there has already been a second one. As I said before, such initiatives are an important window into the state of the local scene. Since you bring both the willingness to change, I'd like to ask you very concretely: what's next for

such a group, which is already very promising and has met several times and developed further? What do you hope for or expect from this gathering?

Emina Smajic:
The idea for the workshop, or the workshop series, arose out of necessity. Once again, I had seen a series in which Muslim people or a Muslim family were portrayed, and once again it was told in a very clichéd way: the evil father, the daughter isn't allowed to... This typical, very Islamophobic storytelling just keeps happening, often due to decades-long structures and prejudices.
For many years, Muslims were often portrayed only as terrorists, and then all these stories about clan structures or blogs emerged—written by people who have no idea about real life. I myself grew up with Palestinians in extended families, but we didn't have clear structures in terms of violence or crime; we were simply people.
I had had enough of watching how people are produced and talked about in Germany. That's how the idea emerged: let's found an association of Muslim filmmakers in Germany. Since last week, it officially exists. Around 80 people from media and games are involved. The goal is to change things structurally, because it can't go on like this.
The participants experience discrimination on the street or in social contexts on a daily basis. For our initiative, I was able to win over Hessen Film, which was very open. They provided funding for speakers and the workshop series.
The first workshop had space for 15 to 20 people, but more than 40 registered from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The goal is to continue next year in Hamburg, then Berlin, and finally include all federal states as well as Vienna and Zurich, in order to support emerging talent. The workshop space is meant to enable empowerment and to form a lasting network.

Participant C:
I'm originally an architect. I had actually hoped to be able to work creatively in my profession, but unfortunately that doesn't happen very often. That's how I came across the workshop [by Emina Smajic] and signed up.
It was very special for me, because so many women came together with different backgrounds, but all wanting to work creatively together or find solutions. We worked together for two days, collected thoughts, listened to lectures, and developed scenes. This created the feeling that together we could really move something and work creatively. That gave me new impulses and I really enjoyed it.
This year, we held another workshop in a smaller group: on the first day there were lectures, on the second day short scenes were shot. Before that, we thought about what we wanted to film, wrote short scripts, and realized the scenes. It was very inspiring and did everyone a lot of good.

Emina Smajic:
If anyone is interested in doing something like this as well, or is wondering how, feel free to approach me. I believe it takes more people, and I can't always do the work alone. I'm very happy about like-minded people—about people who want to think in this direction.
These empowerment workshops are really there so that every person is seen and respected as an equal. That's how creativity emerges. It's really fun. I went home and immediately wrote 15 pages—and I think that's the whole point of it.

Felix Fischl:
That's wonderful. You also mentioned the lack of networks in your presentation. I think it's great that something nationwide has now been founded, and also that your group is already active.

[End of the discussion, transition to the presentation of the Discord server]