



ACTION PLAN 2026

for including Sustainability and Social Awareness into the Moving Cinema Young Programmers methodology

0. Introduction

The European film festival network Young Programmers for Young Audiences! (Young4Film) brings together six festivals from across Europe, united by the goal of attracting and retaining new, younger audiences for auteur cinema. Unlike traditional approaches that create film programmes for young people, Young4Film is committed to a participatory model: empowering young audiences to co-create film programming that speaks to their interests, perspectives, and realities.

A central objective of this current two-year collaboration has been to explore how film programming for young audiences can become a catalyst for greater awareness around ecological, social, and diversity-sensitive topics. The network's vision is twofold: to embed these values not only in the content of selected films, but also in the very structure and organisation of youth-oriented programmes.

During its first project phase (2023–2024), the network developed a joint Sustainability and Social Awareness Charter. This Charter provides a common foundation and set of guiding principles for all partners, reflecting their commitment to sustainable and socially responsible festival practices.

Building on this Charter, the current action plan marks the network's next step: focusing specifically on how film education itself can engage with questions of sustainability and social justice. The aim is to explore ways of raising awareness, encouraging reflection, and empowering young audiences through film programming and educational activities during the 2025–2026 project period.

From its very beginning, the Young Programmers approach has been rooted in a deep curiosity about the human condition and a sincere commitment to empathy. In auteur and arthouse cinema, this ethos is mirrored: filmmakers often encounter their characters and protagonists with a gaze marked by respect, attentiveness, and genuine interest. Such films invite audiences not merely to observe but to enter into a dialogue with the inner worlds of others—encouraging understanding, compassion, and reflection.

Building on this tradition of empathetic engagement, it becomes essential to further broaden the lens of film education. By explicitly integrating questions of sustainability and social justice, we create a richer and more nuanced starting point for discussing film. This expanded perspective allows young audiences to explore not only individual stories and relationships but also the wider contexts—ecological, social, and ethical—that shape lives both on and off the screen. In doing so, film education can inspire a deeper awareness of interconnectedness and responsibility, equipping the next generation to engage thoughtfully with the pressing issues of our time.

1. Methodological Background – The Young Programmers approach (Moving Cinema): Empowering Youth through Active Participation

The Young Programmers approach represents a fundamental paradigm shift in film education: from curating film programs for young audiences to enabling young people themselves to become curators and active agents within the cultural landscape. Rather than acting as passive recipients, participants regularly meet outside or inside of school to watch, analyze, and discuss a diverse selection of European arthouse films. As part of this collective process, they work together to develop a film program that culminates in a public cinema screening, which they not only select but also promote, organize, and host, including moderating discussions after the screening.

This model of programming by youth offers unique value on multiple levels:

- **Deep Artistic Engagement:**

Through shared exploration and critical dialogue, young people immerse themselves in both contemporary and heritage arthouse cinema. They learn to read films attentively, analyze directorial choices, contextualize works within broader artistic movements, and draw connections between films and their own experiences.

- **Empowerment and Agency:**

By taking responsibility for every stage of the event, for example from programming to communication strategies and social media campaigns, the young curators develop a sense of ownership and creative authorship. This process fosters self-confidence, teamwork, and an authentic connection to the films they present.

- **Peer-to-Peer Inspiration:**

A film program curated by youth for youth has the power to reach new audiences in ways that traditional models cannot. The young curators speak the language of their peers, both literally and culturally, bridging gaps and opening up spaces for genuine enthusiasm for European arthouse cinema.

- **Insight for Partners:**

For partner organizations and professionals, this approach offers valuable insights into the viewing habits, interests, and cultural communication channels favored by today's youth. Knowledge that is essential for developing relevant film education strategies.

- **Guided Professional Development:**

Throughout the process, participants are supported by film educators, professional filmmakers, and other experts. This mentorship ensures a balance between youthful perspective and artistic rigor, enriching both the learning journey and the final public presentation.

Each group's working methods are shaped by their unique dynamics and interests, reflected in their selection criteria and the design of their curated program. In leading discussions with filmmakers or experts after screenings, the young curators further deepen their engagement with film as an art form.

Ultimately, the Young Programmers approach opens up new horizons: it transforms young people into responsible cultural actors with their own artistic vision, broadening their perspectives on cinema while expanding the spaces in which they encounter film.

2. Raising Awareness: Key Focus Areas

We live in an age marked by global transformation, including ecological crises, growing social inequality, and increased awareness of diversity and representation. In this context, film as a medium not only reflects societal shifts but also shapes perceptions and attitudes. As mediators and curators of cinematic worlds, we bear the responsibility to foster critical engagement with these pressing issues. Film education that consciously addresses different dimensions of ecological and social sustainability opens up spaces for reflection, dialogue, and transformation, empowering young people to become mindful viewers and active participants and co-creators in shaping cultural narratives.

Empowerment through Reflection and Research

A central element of the Young Programmers approach is the empowerment of youth through (self-) reflection, rich exchange and discourse and independent research. The following strategies support this process:

- Awareness:

Young programmers are encouraged to observe closely how films address topics such as sustainability, gender roles, inclusion, and social justice, both in their narratives and aesthetics.

- Critical Reflection:

Through discussion and analysis, participants learn to question their own perspectives as well as those presented on screen, recognizing underlying ideologies or stereotypes.

- Independent Research:

Youth are guided to investigate the production context of films, exploring whether environmentally friendly practices or fair working conditions were implemented, and which standards or certifications exist.

- Developing an Independent Stance:

By synthesizing their observations and research findings, young curators develop their own position regarding responsible filmmaking, a stance that informs both their programming choices and public discussions.

On-screen and Off-screen Perspectives:

Examples of initial questions to identify your own level of reflection and awareness

- On-screen:

- Which stories about ecology, diversity, gender equality or inclusion are told?
- How are marginalized groups represented?
- Do films offer new perspectives or reinforce existing clichés?

- Off-screen:

- How can we find out whether a film was produced sustainably or inclusively?
- Which organizations (e.g., Green Film) or seals (like the ReFrame Stamp) certify sustainable or gender-equitable productions?
- What information is available about the working conditions on set or the diversity of the crew?

By looking beyond what is visible on screen, young curators learn to understand cinema as both an artistic expression and a product of concrete production realities and constant decisions.

Through this expanded lens, film education becomes a site of critical consciousness, a space where young people not only appreciate cinematic art but also reflect on their own role as cultural actors in a rapidly changing world.

3. Pilot Project

The international Young Programmers Group's Formation and Goals in 2026

The new international Young Programmers group of 2026 brings together twelve participants, each nominated by one of the six partner festivals (two per festival). This diverse group will be accompanied throughout the process by an experienced film educator. From February to June 2026, the group will meet digitally every two weeks for three-hour workshops. The aim is to foster cross-cultural dialogue, empower young people as curators, and deepen their engagement with pressing topics such as sustainability and social justice within the context of auteur cinema.

The pilot project is designed to create a flexible, participant-driven framework: while the group will have its own unique dynamic, all participants are encouraged to reflect on the most relevant societal issues from their own perspectives. The overarching goal is not only to curate films but also to nurture critical awareness and personal responsibility among the young programmers.

Integration of Focus Topics into Film Selection and Discussion

The project begins with an introductory session, where participants get to know each other and explore their individual and collective perspectives on sustainability, environmental protection and social justice. This initial exchange forms the foundation for all further discussions and serves as a reference point for reflecting on the films.

Over the course of 6-8 subsequent workshops, participants will independently watch up to two films in preparation for each session. During the workshops, they will discuss these films in depth, paying particular attention to how themes such as sustainability and social justice are represented both on-screen and off-screen. The selection process emphasizes critical reflection rather than rigid criteria: the group is invited to define its own priorities and sensibilities regarding these focus topics. At the end of this phase, the group will use a consensus-based approach to select two films for presentation at Cinehill Festival in July in Croatia.

Following the film selection, participants will engage in three additional workshop sessions dedicated to preparing the presentation of their two chosen films. These sessions will focus on developing thoughtful introductions, framing the films within the context of sustainability and social justice, and designing engaging ways to involve the festival audience.

Filmmakers or subject-matter experts will be invited as guest speakers, broadening the participants' knowledge and perspectives on key issues. By integrating these voices into the workshops, the project aims to connect film analysis with real-world practices and challenges in sustainable and socially just filmmaking.

At the Cinehill Festival in Croatia, all participants will be present to introduce their selected films in person. If the filmmakers are able to attend, the young programmers will also have the opportunity to conduct Q&A sessions or moderated discussions with them to further deepening their understanding of filmmaking processes and fostering direct exchange between creators and audience.

Expected Outcomes for Participants

- **Critical Engagement:**
Participants will develop their ability to analyze films through the lens of sustainability and social justice, gaining tools for critical thinking that extend beyond cinema.
- **Empowerment & Agency:**
By actively shaping both the selection process and public presentation of their chosen films, young programmers will gain confidence in their own curatorial voice.

- **Intercultural Exchange:**

The international composition of the group fosters dialogue across borders, enabling participants to learn from diverse viewpoints and cultural backgrounds.

- **Professional Experience:**

Through interaction with filmmakers, experts, and festival audiences, both online and on-site at the Cinehill Festival in Croatia, participants will gain valuable insights into professional film culture.

- **Flexible Framework for Future Groups:**

By establishing an open approach that invites the group to articulate its own thematic focus, the pilot sets a precedent for future Young Programmers groups to connect film curation with evolving societal discourses in a meaningful way.

In summary, this pilot project aims not only to curate a compelling film program but also to sensitize young people to urgent global challenges and empower them as thoughtful mediators of visual culture.

4. Evaluation and Next Steps

Approaches for Gathering Feedback and Reflection from Participants

After the conclusion of the Cinehill Festival, comprehensive feedback will be collected from both the Young Programmers and the film educator who accompanied the group. This process will include written surveys as well as guided reflection sessions, allowing participants to share their experiences, insights, and suggestions for improvement. Throughout the entire project, the organizing team maintains a close dialogue with the film educator, ensuring that ongoing feedback can be addressed in real time and any necessary adjustments can be made along the way.

How Results Will Inform a Revised Action Plan for Dissemination Across the Network

All feedback and observations will be compiled into a comprehensive document. This report will synthesize key learnings and provide concrete recommendations for integrating the focus topics of sustainability and social justice into Young Programmers activities at all network festivals. While these themes may not always be at the center of programming decisions in every local group, the perspectives gained through this pilot project offer valuable tools for enriching both film selection and discussion. Emphasizing both the content on screen and the production practices behind the scenes can broaden the understanding of film educators and participants regarding the role of cinema in shaping and reflecting social values.

Vision for Embedding These Principles in All Future Activities

The vision for the future is to meaningfully expand Young Programmers' methodology, which has been continuously developed over a long period of time and is now well-established and proven, by incorporating new perspectives on sustainability and social justice. The program's established strengths with its thoughtful, inclusive way of engaging with films, their stories and characters, and its deep respect for the creative work of filmmakers and their teams, remain central. This reflective and dialogical culture views cinema not only as entertainment, but celebrates it as art and an important meeting place and catalyst that brings people together and enables them to share their experiences.

By integrating ecological and social awareness into this strong methodological foundation, we want to empower young programmers to connect their love for cinema with a deeper understanding of its impact - both on-screen and off-screen.

Sharing the outcomes and best practices from the pilot project across the network will enable each festival to sensitively adapt these expanded perspectives to their local context. In this way, we aim to foster a living culture of reflection, responsibility, and critical engagement, that honors the unifying power of cinema while equipping young people to navigate an ever-changing world with curiosity and care.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this initiative aims to broaden the horizons of young film enthusiasts by integrating themes of sustainability and social justice into their programming activities. By building on the Young Programmers’ proven methodology, which is centered on open dialogue, respect, and appreciation for diverse cinematic voices, we hope to inspire a new generation to engage critically and empathetically with both the art of film and the world around them.

We encourage all film educators to actively foster awareness and critical thinking among youth, empowering them to question, reflect, and connect what they see on screen with broader environmental and societal issues. Through thoughtful guidance and inclusive discussion, educators can help young people become not only passionate curators, but also responsible, curious citizens who recognize the power of cinema to shape perspectives and spark meaningful change.

