



SCHOOL AND DOCUMENTARY: «Promoting Democratic Values and Human Rights Through Film». A project funded by National Endowment for Democracy NED and implemented by DokuFest

Ein Interview mit Eroll Bilibani, Festivaldirektor DokuFest (Prizren, Kosovo)

What is DokuFest and what are the tradition and the aim of the festival?

DokuFest started as an initiative of a group of friends – all coming from different professional backgrounds, but connected through one common dream. The main idea behind the initiation of the first film festival in post-war Kosovo was very simple: TO RETURN THE CINEMA BACK TO THE CITY.

Not that they only lived their dream! Through hard-work, the festival that started 15 years ago with some 20 films from the region – with no external funding, but with a large dose of passion, consistent work and dedication – turned DokuFest into the main cultural event in Kosovo and into one of the most important film festivals in the region and beyond. It is ranked as one of the 25 top documentary film festivals in the world.

Turning this dream into a success story and the philosophy behind it was based on three things: 1) Love for cinema and the city, 2) a «nothing is impossible approach» and 3) including the entire city in the organization of the festival. This is perhaps best illustrated by the paradox of DokuFest organizing a film festival in a city without a functional cinema or the technical capacity to support such a venture. But the persistence of the DokuFest founders and their passion for film and love for the city has mobilized an army of young volunteers to turn this dream into reality.

One project of DokuFest is called *School and Documentary*. Can you describe this project?

Our *School and Documentary* project is the flagship project of our DokuLab program. It is in fact an Educational Film Centre for storytelling on both a national and a regional level. We use documentaries as educational tools in high schools in areas populated by majority and by minority communities. The collaboration with municipal administrations allowed us to access high schools and to establish cinema clubs managed by students. At this moment our organization became a proactive agent within the community, evolving from «passive» event organizer to holding a partner status within the educational system.

All of these activities enabled a natural expansion of the project to develop several pillars: the invitation of schools to specific events, the development of educational materials, the establishment of film clubs in high schools, and teaching students to learn the basics and methodology of filmmaking in order to address human right issues and democratic values through their lens. Five of the films presented at Jugendfilmtage are the films produced by young aspiring filmmakers and activists from this program.

What are the aims of *School and Documentary*?

Our aim is the creation of cultural capital resources in the youth community that enables young people to articulate their thoughts and opinions on various important issues such as human rights, the promotion of democratic values, and active citizenship through filmmaking.

Why is it important to work with young people?

Our program is designed as a platform to encourage creativity among young people. The importance of this work is universal! It is about empowering our youth through creative learning and personal development. In addition, this type of our work can be used to tackle difficult subjects such as racism or homophobia. And in addition, this creative approach when working with young people frees the mind in a way that enables a person to absorb knowledge more easily. All of these reasons together



create an aware youth – a youth who engages in complex topics and becomes a valuable member of the society.

What are possible difficulties that can come up in the work with young people, especially when you discuss delicate topics such as trauma, poverty, injustice, fears? And how do you face these issues?

Working with young people can be challenging and difficult, but also rewarding. The most difficult part is engaging educators and other education executives to apply these extra-curricular methodologies in addressing difficult and complex topics. In Kosovo, we have noticed that the young people involved in our programmes become more proactive agents. We carefully chose films that boost their confidence when they talk about it. The medium of film is becoming accepted alongside literature, and it broadens their perspective on and the general knowledge of art and culture.

Do you think that your approach can be adapted to open youth spaces, where young people spend their free time and where there is no fixed schedule (different to school)?

Yes! And in the last couple of years, we have been encouraging this approach. Luckily, many young activists that have been part of our programs in the past have started to look for and to use public spaces. They turn them into open spaces dedicated to young people so they can explore their creativity, but also to use film as a medium – to discuss particular topics.

What are the special advantages of the medium of film to discuss social topics and personal experiences with young people?

Film opens up our hearts and is a door to our minds. Our students have often expressed that tackling a sensitive subject through film makes the learning process more efficient – it frees the mind and enables them to absorb knowledge more easily. It creates a strong sense of awareness on topics such as homophobia, racism, cultural and ethnic divide. Most importantly, it allows non-linear thinking, it fosters empathy and it connects young people with their passion.

What is the strength of documentary in this work? What makes it different to the fiction film?

Documentaries are about real life stories. They generate empathy, and this can transform the way we think and the way we feel about a certain topic. And good documentaries have the ability to dramatize and empower young audiences to take part in the changes that they want to see, while festivals like the Jugendfilmtage bring audiences closer to films that they otherwise would have not seen.

Weitere Informationen zu *School and Documentary*:
<http://dokufest.com/dokulab/school-and-documentary/>