



## Connecting the dots

### Assessing cooperation among LGBTI and Queer film festivals and the need and feasibility of establishing a network

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## Summary

There are over 270 LGBT and Queer film festivals worldwide. In this short study, based on existing research, interviews and a survey, we found that many organisers of these festivals recognise the value of cooperation and networking. The main reasons why festival organisers cooperate are related to programme development. Most organisers are quite satisfied with their current cooperation with other festivals and would appreciate even more collaboration. To facilitate cooperation and exchange among LGBTI and Queer film festivals some interesting regional networks and ‘social media networks’ exist. While organisers are in essence interested to join a global network of LGBTI and Queer film festivals, there are many challenges related to the establishment of such a global network. To strengthen cooperation, we therefore advise festival organisers to join or make use of other, new or existing, tools and structures that facilitate cooperation and exchange of information. To intensify collaboration, we suggest to set up smaller thematic or regional networks rather than one global network for LGBTI and Queer film festivals. In addition, ad hoc partnerships can be considered as efficient and flexible forms of cooperation.

## Introduction

The LGBTI and Queer film festival movement started in the late 1970s in North America, part of a growing LGBTI rights Movement. Much research has been done on the history and developments of this film festival circuit, e.g. by scholars like Skadi Loist, Dana Jordanova, Marijke de Valck and Karen Tongson. LGBTI and Queer artists who did not feel welcome at other, regular film festivals, felt attracted to establishing (and participating in) alternative festivals. Frameline, formerly known as the San Francisco International LGBTQ+ Film Festival, started in 1977, and is currently the oldest continuous queer film festival in the world. Festivals in Los Angeles (Outfest) and New York City (NewFest) were founded a few years later, while in Europe similar festivals started in Slovenia, Italy and Denmark.

Decades later, hundreds of LGBTI and Queer film festivals exist worldwide, especially in North America and Western Europe. A study by Loist (2015) showed that 276 LGBT and Queer film festivals existed. We have the impression that especially in Asia LGBT and Queer film festivals are coming up, with one third of all newly established film festivals since 2014 being located in Asia<sup>1</sup>. (This rise of Asian festivals is not surprising given global demographic and economic trends: the population of Asia is now equivalent to almost 60% of the total world population.)

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<sup>1</sup> This assessment is based on data available at [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/List\\_of\\_LGBT\\_film\\_festivals](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/List_of_LGBT_film_festivals)

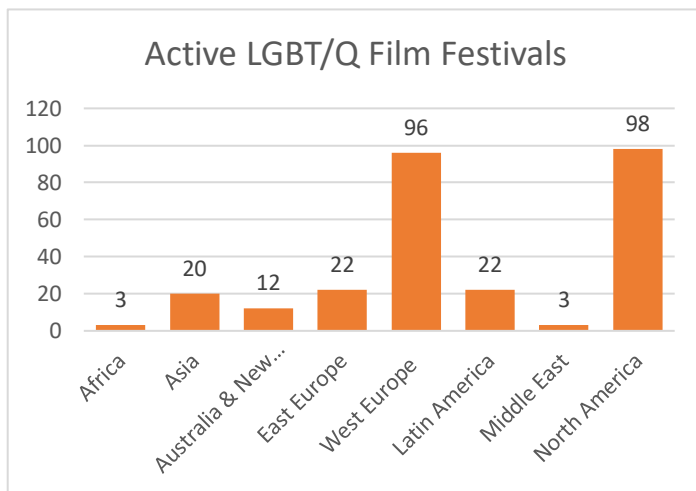


Figure 1. LGBT and Queer film festivals that were active in 2014  
Source: Loist, 2015<sup>2</sup>

Since a few years there seems to be a quick increase of ‘alternative’ queer festivals in (Western) Europe, like a kind of countermovement against the white and male dominated ‘standard’ LGBTI film festivals. The rise of these festivals can possibly be explained by the tendency of migrants organising themselves and increasingly claiming their space in the public domain.

Especially in places where the rights of LGBTI individuals are not respected, and discrimination is widely occurring, it is hard to organise a festival with this topic. To avoid problems, many such festivals side-step fixed identity categories like LGBTI, gay or queer in the title of their event. Instead, they use terms like “alternative,” “diversity,” “other” or similar metaphors often in the local language (Loist, 2015). This ranges from Side by Side Festival in Russia to the Ke Nako (“Now is the Time”) Festival in Botswana. Yet, where possible, most of the festival names include words like queer, trans, lesbian, gay, pink or rainbow, as it helps the audience identify with the event.

Through its International Support programme, Movies that Matter has supported several LGBTI and Queer film festivals, in regions where such festivals hardly exist, and where LGBTI issues are underrepresented in the public debate. Between 2008 and 2019, we have financially supported 38 projects that are categorised as LGBTI rights or Queer film festival, from Bolivia to Turkey and from Belarus to Myanmar. Half of the supported projects (19) took place in Asia, nine in Eastern Europe, seven in Latin America, two in Africa, and one in the Middle East. These projects, involving a total investment of €245,000,- reached over 100,000 visitors.

Although proper (baseline) data is lacking, we note that many LGBTI and queer festivals are relatively small in terms of budget and employees, compared to other, regular film festivals. Despite the many tasks involved, related to fundraising and reporting, programming, production, publicity and communication, most LGBTI and Queer film festivals are run by volunteers and often work in relative isolation. Only a few festivals are able to employ people full-time.

Besides financial support, Movies that Matter also supports these festivals through advice and networking. When possible, we actively link the organisers of the LGBTI festivals to another LGBTI festival for support or advice. In our efforts to connect the organisers of LGBTI festivals in different countries to each other we noted that no global LGBTI film festival network seems to exist.

<sup>2</sup> Loist, Skadi, 2015, Queer Film Culture: Performative Aspects of LGBT/Q Film Festivals, Dissertation Hamburg University

Some specialised festivals, such as short film festivals, documentary festivals or human rights film festivals created their own official networks. Examples of international networks include the Green Film Network (an association of environmental film festivals) and the Human Rights Film Network (for festivals screening human rights films). As one of the co-founders of the Human Rights Film Network (HRFN), Movies that Matter recognises collaboration as one of its fundamental principles. The HRFN is a partnership of human rights film festivals from all over the world. Started in 2004 with 14 members, the HRFN has grown to 43 member festivals at the end of 2019. Movies that Matter coordinates the secretariat of the network. As such we strongly see the value of cooperation and exchange. As a result, we decided to explore whether any formal network for LGBTI and Queer film festivals existed, which could encourage cooperation and exchange, and whether there was a need for such a network.

### **The feasibility study**

We assumed that especially the organisers of smaller LGBTI film events are looking for ways to connect, e.g. to share knowledge, film suggestions, practical ideas, explore joint programming or funding applications. Particularly initiatives in regions where LGBTI emancipation is a very significant concern and where publicly discussing LGBTI rights is a major security concern, are often quite isolated. Based on our own experience with the HRFN and based on information from the supported LGBTI festivals, we had clear and concrete indications that being part of an international network can make a great difference.

Organisers of such events, usually extremely passionate and brave individuals, could benefit from being part of a network, be it formal or informal, in a variety of ways. Linking with like-minded people not only broadens their international perspective and network, it can also serve to inspire and to exchange information on films, new filmmakers, contact information, etc. It would, for instance, be very worthwhile to share knowledge and advice about dealing with censorship and cultural barriers one faces. When dealing with the authorities, being part of an international known network (knowing people) can provide some sense of security. Moreover, being connected internationally can boost festival's credibility in fundraising matters.

Therefore, supported by Oak Foundation, Movies that Matter decided to assess whether cooperation is taking place, and whether setting up an (in)formal network would be appreciated and feasible.

### **Methodology**

We have first asked the ideas and opinion of leading figures and organisations in this field. These include representatives of festivals and other initiatives, like Mel Pritchard, who administers a comprehensive list of Queer film festivals around the world: [QueerFilmFestivals.org](http://QueerFilmFestivals.org), Saadat Munir from the Asia Pacific Queer Film Festival Alliance, Hana Kulhánková, former director of the Mezipatra Queer Film Festival, Chris Belloni from the International Queer & Migrant Film Festival, and academic researcher Marijke de Valck, co-founder of the Film Festival Research Network. Main questions we asked were *“Is there a need to create a network?”* and *“How should the ideal network look like?”* Their input has been very valuable for a good understanding and assessment of the survey results, as well as for the formulation of recommendations.

In addition to these interviews, a survey was carried out among LGBTI and Queer film festival organisers in December 2019. The sample size is 33 (out of 230 festivals we wrote to, 33 responded within six weeks); in our analysis the responses were anonymised. Of course a substantial ‘participation bias’ may have occurred, so we cannot state how representative our study is for all LGBTI and Queer Film Festivals. Nevertheless, the outcomes of our interviews and survey give some

ideas on whether, why and how LGBTI and Queer film festivals are cooperating. The survey questions are presented in the annex.

### Report

In this assessment report, we will describe in what way LGBTI and Queer film festivals cooperate, and which (types of) networks exist. Moreover, we will explain what type of cooperation and network festival organisers currently desire. We also present opportunities and constraining factors for establishing a network. Lastly, we will provide recommendations to encourage cooperation and exchange.

#### Terminology: LGBTI alphabet

In the first place there are many different sexual and gender minorities. For the sake of simplicity, in this report we use the acronym LGBTI (referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual people). Yet often the Q is added (which can refer to both queer as questioning), the A (for asexual people), as well as the + symbol, which stands for all of the other sexualities, sexes, and genders that aren't included in these few letters (including pansexual, gender nonconforming, gender-fluid, non-binary and androgynous persons).

## Cooperation

“No festival can exist outside the influence sphere of the film festival circuit”, according to academic Skadi Loist (2015)<sup>3</sup>, emphasizing the importance of understanding film festivals as part of an interconnected network; the film festival circuit. Research suggests that thousands of festivals exist globally, who are all acting and interacting in very different ways. While all festivals are by default linked to a greater film festival circuit via the films and people flowing through them, not all festivals are actively exchanging or cooperating.



Figure 2. Cooperation with other film festivals

First of all, it is remarkable that 28 of the 33 respondents (85%) indicated that they already cooperate with other film festivals. These are not only other film festivals in the same country or continent, but also festivals from other parts of the world. Most cooperation is seen among LGBTI and Queer Film

<sup>3</sup> <sup>3</sup> Loist, Skadi, 2015, Queer Film Culture: Performative Aspects of LGBT/Q Film Festivals, Dissertation Hamburg University

Festivals, but cooperation with other types of film festivals (regular film festivals) is also regularly reported on (figure 3).

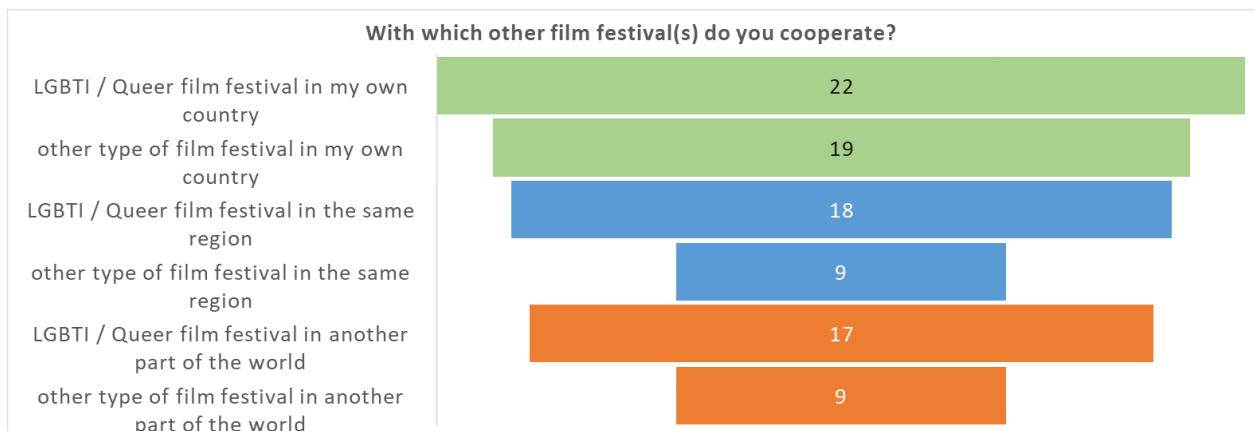


Figure 3. Type and location of partner festivals

We asked festival organisers to indicate what the cooperation involves concretely. They responded in their own words, as we did not provide any suggestions or answer categories. Some gave extensive answers, others were a bit shorter. We later analysed and categorised their answers. These are presented in figure 4.

It seems most cooperation concentrates around the sharing of information, contact information, suggestions of (new) films, etc. Almost all festivals indicated that this is something they collaborate on with other festivals. In addition, 50% of the festival organisers state they cooperate with respect to sharing (the costs of) guests, sharing film copies, equipment or subtitle files. One third of festival organisers indicated that their cooperation involves joint efforts in programming matters, e.g. by programming a part of the film programme at a partner festival (a window, or programme section), or developing a joint workshop for filmmakers.

Cross-promotion of each other’s festivals, exchanging knowledge and inviting other festival directors to attend the festival - and being invited in return - are other concrete forms of cooperation that were mentioned by several respondents. Bringing in programmers from other LGBTI and Queer film festivals is a great way to recognise one’s international colleagues and build a network of international friends or ambassadors for the festival. This is quite customary in other types of festivals as well.

Another interesting remark is the cooperation around awards. The Iris Prize is a good example. This is an international film prize for films about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex audiences. Each of the partner festivals selects one film annually to participate in the Iris Prize. All films are then judged by a panel of international filmmakers and artists. The Iris Prize is awarded during a four-day festival in Cardiff every year. The winner receives £30,000, the largest prize for a gay and lesbian film in the world.

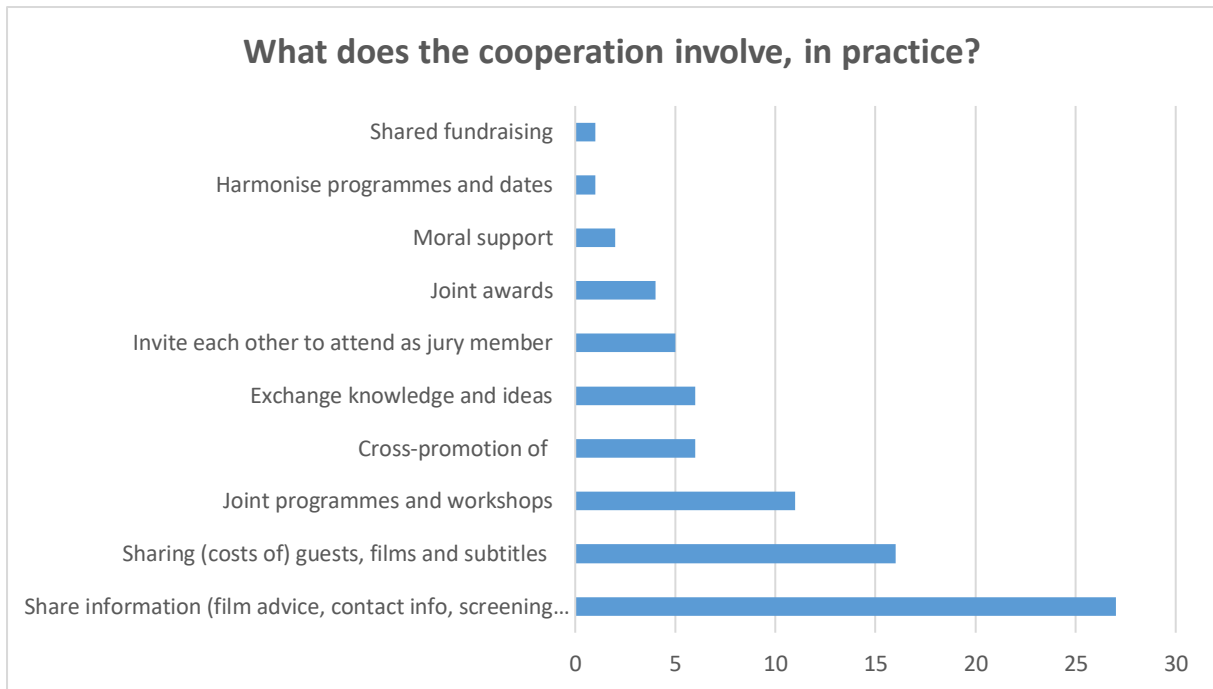


Figure 4. Concrete forms of existing cooperation

We noted that generally, festivals are quite satisfied with how the cooperation is going. On a 1-10 scale, the average score was a 7,5, whereas most festival organisers (43%) even rated the current cooperation with an 8. This is presented in figure 5.

There were, however, a substantial number of festivals (8 festivals, representing 24% of the total) who scored their current cooperation with a 5 or a 6 on a 1-10 scale. We perceive this as a representation of (slight) dissatisfaction. To keep the survey short and accessible we did not ask what festival organisers miss or dislike about the current cooperation, but we can conclude that several partnerships can certainly be improved.

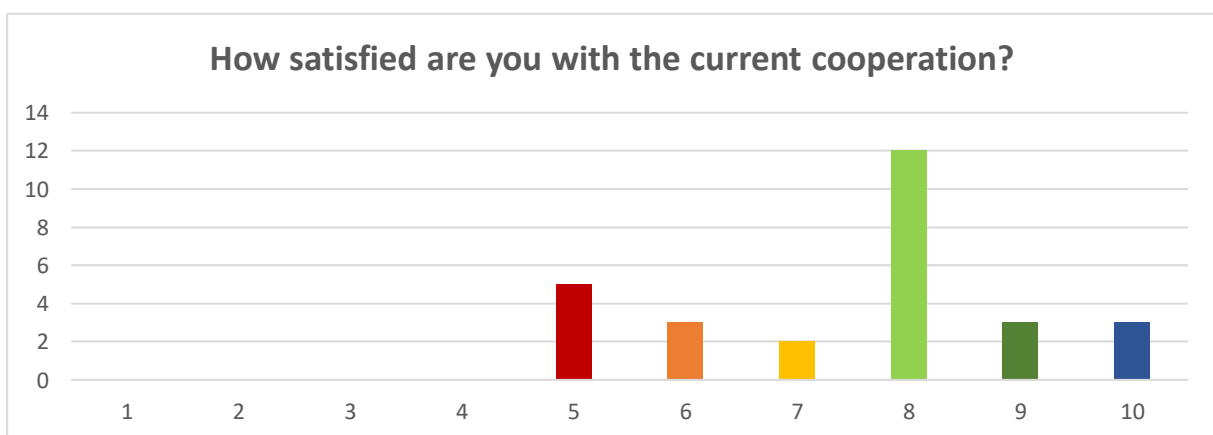


Figure 5. Satisfaction with current cooperation

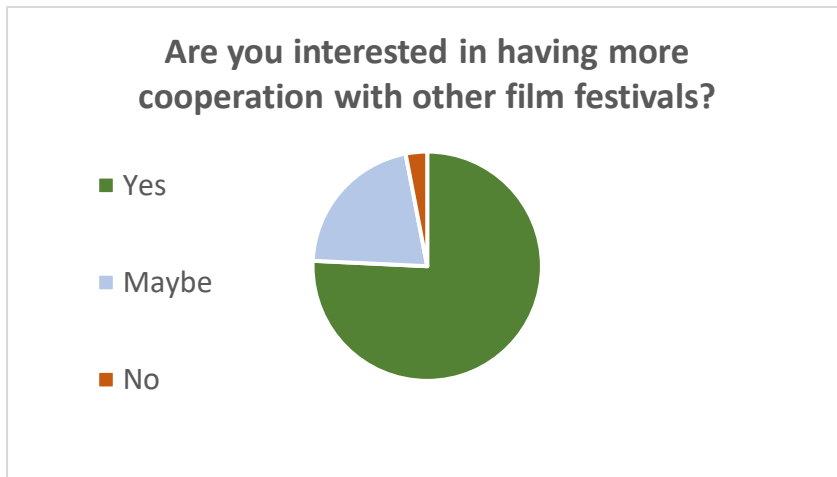


Figure 6. Interest in more cooperation among LGBTI and Queer film festivals

Only one of 33 respondents indicated that more cooperation with other festivals is not desirable for them. This was a popular British festival, member of the Queer Film Network UK & Ireland. (They already have 30 partners and even have a ‘waiting list of potential partners’.) All other respondents indicated that they are – possibly - interested in developing more cooperation with other film festivals. This shows that the need for more cooperation exists.

We also asked what organisers expect from more (potential) cooperation in the future (figure 7). Answers to this question were collected in a similar way as we did with ‘existing cooperation’ (figure 4). Expectations are diverse, but similar to the existing situation most festival organisers are mainly interested in practical, concrete forms of cooperation, such as sharing (contact) information, film suggestions, as well as sharing (cost of) guests, subtitles and film transport. For example, one Australian festival indicated they would be interested to “*obtain early word on new queer films emerging from overseas festivals*”.

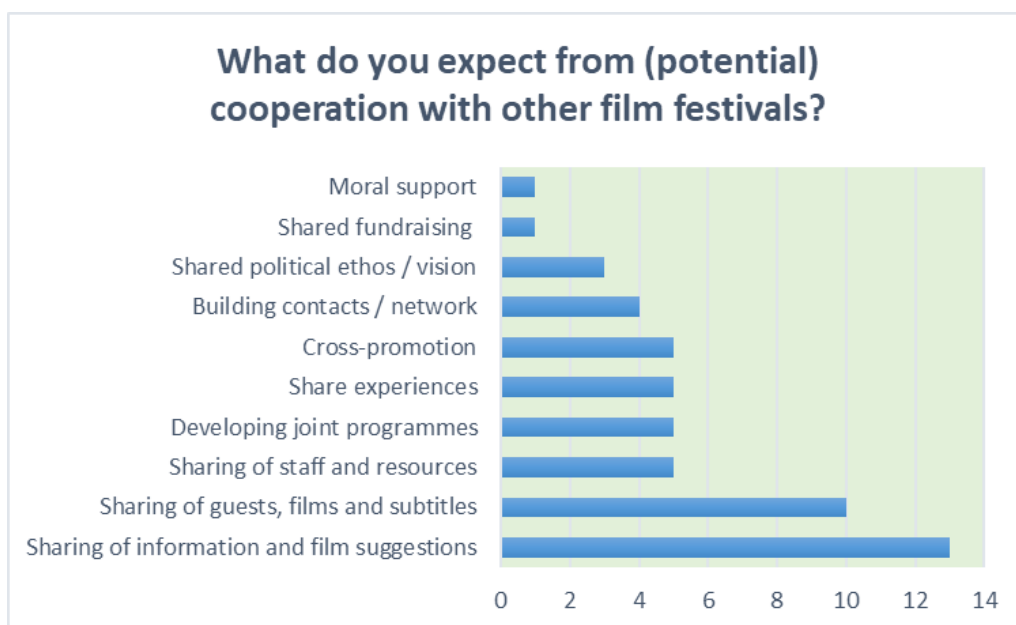


Figure 7. Expectations from potential cooperation



Another festival, operating in a repressive LGBTI environment, mentioned that they would appreciate other, non-LGBTI festivals based in the same country to provide greater exposure and moral support concerning what happens to them, and concerning the legal developments on LGBTI related issues. However such in-depth and long-term types of cooperation, like mutual moral support (1 x), shared fundraising (1 x) and developing a shared ethos or vision (3 x) were not mentioned very often as a reason to cooperate.

Referring to the appreciation of how cooperation with other members is currently going, as presented in figure 5, we noted that members of formal networks have a slightly higher appreciation of the cooperation than festivals that are not a member of a network. With average scores of 7,7 (members) against 7,3 (non-members) we certainly observe a slight difference here.

The next section will list the LGBTI or Queer film festival networks that currently exist and will elaborate on the considerations of festival organisers to join these networks.

## Networks

Our survey showed that about half of the festivals - 16 out of 33 - are already member of an (in)formal international network with other film festivals, not necessarily related to LGBTI and Queer topics. Some examples of such networks include Film Festival Alliance, the Programmers of Colour Collective, and a closed Facebook group called Film Festival Organizers. Yet, as mentioned in the introduction, we also wonder whether the networking is organised along thematic lines (LGBTI/Queer). In other words, did LGBTI and Queer film festivals also create their own (in)formal alliances?

First and foremost, programmers and festival directors often know each other and meet at large international film festivals worldwide, like the Berlin International Film Festival, Sundance Festival or the Festival International du Film Lesbien in Paris. The Frameline San Francisco International LGBTQ+ Film Festival, which takes place every year in June, seems to be the leading festival for LGBTI film professionals. Of course there are other important festivals in every continent or region. At these occasions programmers share information, film suggestions, etc. Although not formalised as 'networks', these large festivals are primary platforms for exchange and networking.

Besides these regular affiliations and contacts, some official LGBTI and Queer alliances also exist. Most of these formal alliances are built around local or regional lines. Although this list is possibly not all-encompassing, an overview of such networks is provided below:

### Regional networks

#### *Latin America and Spain*

Festivals from Spanish-speaking countries joined forces in the 'Red Iberoamericana de Cine LGBT'. The project started around 2005, supported by Fundacion Triangulo in Madrid, with about 10 Spanish-speaking, international festivals, who shared the primary objective of achieving social change through cinema. The network members invested in training and transfer of skills and knowledge on cultural management, effective communication, productional matters, fundraising and programming issues like arranging screening rights. The network was coordinated by the Spanish LesGaiCineMad (Festival Internacional de Cine Gai Lésbico y Transexual de Madrid). Since 2012, this Ibero-American LGBT Film Network has no financial support anymore. Despite this fact, and the termination of external communication (e.g. their website <http://www.cinelgbt.org>) and the

cooperation among members is still going strong. Network members continue to share subtitles, programming ideas, and guests.

#### *Asia-Pacific*

As recently as 2015, the 'Asia Pacific Queer Film Festival Alliance' (APQFFA) was established (<https://www.apqffa.org>). This reflects the trend that, since 2014, many (one third) of the newly established LGBTI and Queer film festivals are based in Asia. In only a few years, the network increased from 8 members in 2015 to 25 in January 2020. According to their website: *"From Japan in the North to New Zealand in the South, Hawai'i in the East to Pakistan in the West, our alliance strives to be an inclusive body, offering support and networking to festivals and filmmakers"*. Hence we can assume that the network is not only a *response* to the growth in LGBTI and Queer Film Festivals in Asia, but the network has also *reinforced* this trend. APQFFA has annual face-to-face meetings at one of the member festivals.

#### *United Kingdom and Ireland*

Another network that is not very well known, but interesting to mention is the 'Queer Film Network' (QFN). It is open to film festivals from the United Kingdom and Ireland. QFN was established in October 2015, with the aim to share knowledge and encourage each other to develop and nurture queer film in the UK and Ireland. *"Working together to create a vibrant and inclusive network, we provide opportunities for members to connect with each other to develop collaborations, find new content, and gain ideas about how best to serve LGBTQIA+ audiences"*, according to the website. The QFN currently has 18 members in the different regions of the United Kingdom, and one in Ireland.

#### *Germany*

After the United States, the country with most LGBTI or queer film festivals (at least 24) is Germany. It is therefore not surprising that these festivals have formed an alliance, called 'QueerScope'. It is a union of relatively small, *"independent queer film festivals in Germany, a co-operation of 16 festivals in Germany and 1 in Switzerland"*, according to their website. The festivals are all independent, but work tightly together. Member festivals screen films together, share promo material and exhibition copies in order to save filmmakers or distributors effort and money; they coordinate and share their own subtitle translations, and jointly invite filmmakers to the festivals. They also present a joint award; the QueerScope Debut Film Award.

Berlin International Film Festival's Teddy Award is also interesting in this respect. They offer a wide scale of networking opportunities for 'Queer Programmers'. Several programmers from LGBTI and Queer film festivals mentioned that they meet in Berlin every year and use the opportunity to share information and discuss cooperation. This illustrates that, despite the fact that this is not a formal network, the Berlinale Teddy Award programme functions as a kind of network for programmers of LGBTI and Queer film festivals.

We have heard about other initiatives, e.g. efforts to start a formal European alliance, by the directors of the Hamburg Queer Film Festival (Germany), Queer Lisboa (Portugal) and Mezipatra (in the Czech Republic), but this did not work out due to financial constraints. In India, Kashish LGBT Film Festival is taking the lead to form an alliance of Indian LGBTQ film festivals. However, they currently have no funding yet to invite all the members for a face-to-face meeting at Kashish 2020 edition. (See section on Challenges).

We can conclude that a global network of LGBTI and Queer film festivals (similar to the Human Rights Film Network for human rights film festivals) does not formally exist, and that a national or regional network only exists in a few regions.

### Online networks

In the past decade, with the normalisation of online social media, communication has increasingly become digital. So have LGBTI film festival networks. Obviously, the existing networks - mentioned in the section above - developed digital forms of cooperation (Google sheets) and online channels like webpages and social media groups on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. More interestingly, we have seen the start of some networks that are functioning only online. These networks have a lower threshold to join, as often there are no membership fees, and they are often more informal. The disadvantage of this informal and often voluntary character is that its continuity and success greatly depend on personal involvement, time and energy. The main online initiatives are mentioned here:

#### *Global LGBTQ+ Film Festival Network*

This network group on Facebook is intended for everyone working for LGBTQ+ film festivals around the world. The main objective is to ease communication between people working for LGBTQ+ film festivals around the world. It is an information sharing forum, a social network and a professional platform at the same time. Practically, it facilitates members to:

- Share advice on film festival making/coordination
- Ask questions related to LGBTQ+ film festivals
- Tap into a network of fellow festival colleagues around the world
- Post news and updates relevant for LGBTQ+ film festivals
- Get to know fellow film festival colleagues from around the world

The network was created by MIX Copenhagen LGBT Film Festival in January 2016. Membership is open to individuals who are involved in the organisation of an LGBTQ+ film festival (including volunteers). Currently the group has almost 300 members.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/948846418529234>

#### *PopcornQ*

The PopcornQ Film & Video Professionals Facebook Group is a resource for LGBT film and video professionals (makers, distributors, exhibitors and festival programmers, journalists, publicists, etc.). It was founded about 10 years ago by Jenni Olson, who co-directed the Frameline LGBT film festival in San Francisco in the early 1990s. The group has around 850 members.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/pqprofessionals>

The same person, Jenni Olson, also manages and moderates an email list for LGBT film professionals.

#### *The Big Queer Film Festival List*

The Big Queer Film festival List is an online calendar with an overview of all queer film festivals worldwide. The list was created in 2005 and is still regularly maintained by Mel Pritchard, who is based in Australia. As programmer, Pritchard was involved in the organisation of the Hamburg International Queer Film Festival from 2005 to 2010 as well as other European queer film festivals. The list contains festival names, locations, the festivals' website addresses, email addresses and dates of the upcoming editions. We expect that the list is mainly used by LGBTI and Queer filmmakers interested in submitting their films. It can, however, also be used by festival organisers looking for up-to-date (contact) information. <http://www.queerfilmfestivals.org/>

We are pretty confident that there are more such groups, including private networks, which facilitate the flow of ideas and information. For instance, one respondent mentioned they are part of an informal secret group on Facebook of a queer-alternative-porn scene.

**Network membership**

It is hard to assess how many currently operating festivals are in fact member of an online network, as many online networks have no formal criteria for membership, and accept individuals rather than organisations, and also other people interested in LGBTI and Queer film, such as filmmakers. Moreover, some networks are not public, others are not (very) active anymore. So reliable information on that is hard to find.

Anyway, we asked respondents whether they would – in theory – be interested in joining a formal network of LGBTI and Queer film festivals, should that exist. Figure 8 below shows that the vast majority would be (possibly) interested in joining such a network.



Figure 8. Interest of festival organisers to join an international LGBTI / Queer film festival network

Our survey results also clearly show that especially those festivals that are already member of another network, are very positive about joining such a network, should that be set up.

So, many festival organisers indicated their desire to join a formal LGBTI / Queer film festival network. Our survey also gives more information about why festival organisers would like to join. Most of the reasons are related to programme development, for instance by getting information about the latest films from other regions, share (contact) information of filmmakers or right holders, or developing joint programmes or workshops.

Not surprisingly, quite some reasons for joining a formal alliance are related to cost sharing. Festivals can share subtitle files, or the costs of creating subtitles. Also, film copies can be shared; even in this digital age DCPs (digital cinema packages) are still often being shipped on large portable hard disks. Festivals can also share travel costs of guests, when festivals that are near each other take place around the same dates. Joint negotiations for screening fees was also mentioned; screening fees can be quite a substantial part of a festival budget. Understandably, festival organisers expect to have a stronger position in such negotiations when one is member of an official network.

Remarkably, joint fundraising was mentioned only once.

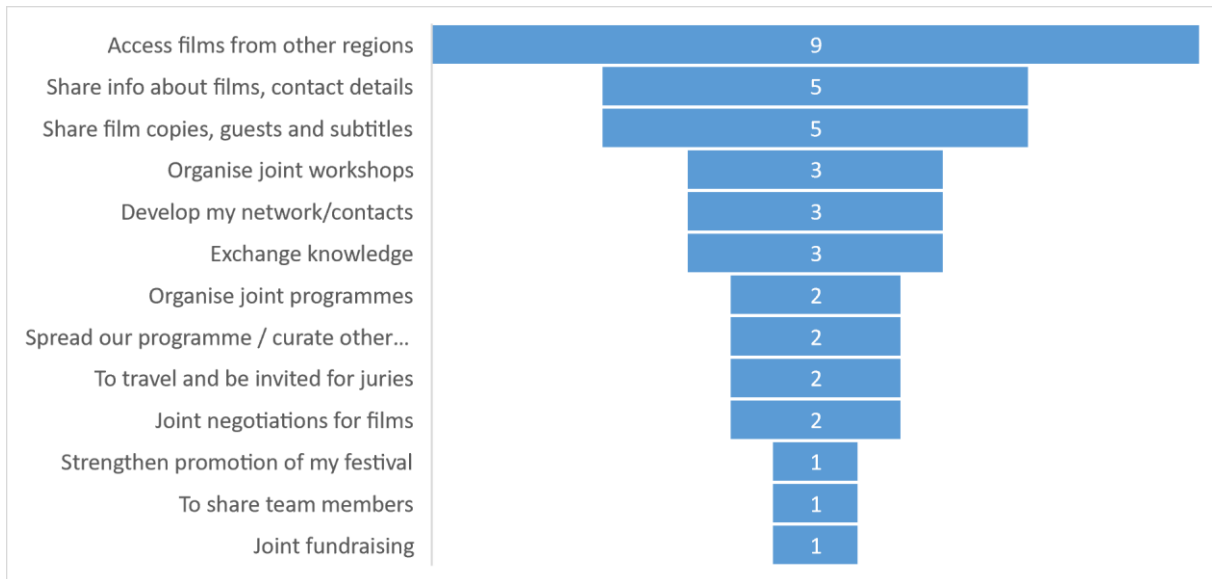


Figure 9. Reasons for joining a network of LGBTI and Queer film festivals.

Next thing to find out is how such a network should look like. Should it be a regional network, a global network? Online, offline, or both? We have asked those who showed interest about their ideas on how such a network should look like. We also asked whether it should be a global or a regional group. From their answers we can conclude that the majority would appreciate a network for members from all over the world. Most respondents (43%) would rather join a global network, whereas a quarter (27%) of respondents stated their preference for a regional alliance (European, Latin American, North American and African were all mentioned). The others (30%) are open to either type. See figure 10 below.

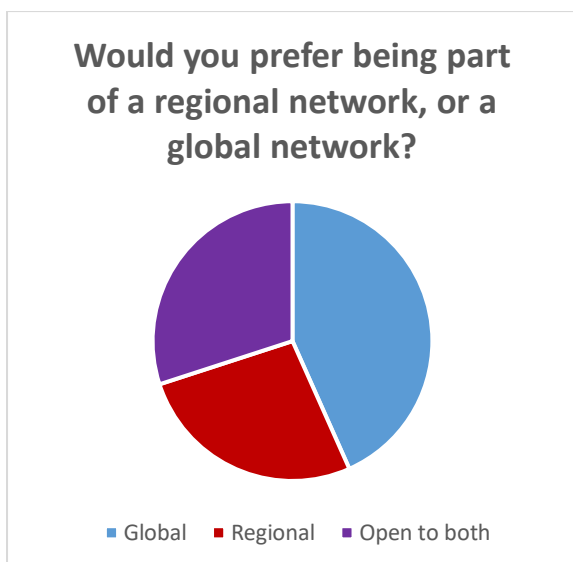


Figure 10. Preferred geographical scale

We asked respondents to share their other ideas on how such a network should look like. Although people have quite different ideas about how such a network would look like, some characteristics of the ideal network were mentioned by many:

### 1. Face to face meetings

Many people mentioned the importance of meeting each other in person. To that end, annual meetings can be organised at one of the larger LGBTI film festivals, or at the Berlinale. As one respondent put it: *“Face-to-face meetings work best; in the end personal contact will contribute to improve[d] collaboration.”* Some people also suggested that perhaps this could be organised every year at different festivals. Concretely, a combination of a networking event with workshops focusing on industry developments and challenges was proposed.

### 2. Online portal

Ideally the network would offer more than a once-per-year networking event. Many suggested they would like the network to host a website and regular online meetings. An online discussion forum would greatly help to understand the themes and trends of film production. As one respondent put it: *“It would be good to have a portal that is a home for all Queer / LGBT film festivals that would be of interest to film programmers, distributors, filmmakers, academics. Provision of online workshops (focusing on programming, fundraising, social media marketing, sponsorship etc), base of contacts that would provide networking, articles / reviews on upcoming film releases etc.”* So ideally the network would facilitate a web portal. Besides the annual event at one of the larger festivals, generally most contact would be online.

### 3. Rotating leadership

Who should take the lead in establishing such a network? And who should run it? We have asked this question in our survey and the answers are surprisingly like-minded. First and foremost, people think it should be run by one of the members, who is dedicated, with experience in the field, and who has easy access to contacts. It is crucial that someone takes the lead who is driven by enthusiasm, not by personal gain. Besides, many respondents preferred a system of rotating leadership; the lead should be given to a different festival every year, or every two years. One person indicated that leadership should consist of many persons. Only one (South European) festival indicated that they themselves would be interested in establishing and running such a network.

### 4. Costs

Practically, to cover the costs of the network, it was mentioned that a small pool of initial funding would be needed, and additional funds could be generated also through grants or advertising. One of the current APQFFA members indicated that especially the organisation of annual events at one of the member festivals is quite costly, and that resources for this are difficult to find. Most people suggested that some minimal membership fees should probably be required, or even desired, but differentiation is needed based on the financial capacity of the festival. Membership fees *“should be tiered with a free option for those who don't have the resources,”* according to one respondent. Another stated: *“Membership fees can be considered but it should be subsidized for smaller festivals who may not be able to afford it.”* These remarks reflect the financial situation of many of the LGBTI and Queer film festivals in the world.

### 5. Examples

Many respondents interested in the set-up of a global network referred to other existing regional or online networks. The UK-oriented Queer Film Network was referred to as *“a very successful UK network for LGBT+ film festivals.”* The Asia-Pacific Queer Film Festival Alliance was also mentioned as a good example more than once, given their good online portal/website and their yearly meeting at one of the member festivals. Also, the earlier mentioned Film Festival Organizers Facebook group

and the Global LGBTQ+ Film Festival Network Facebook group were mentioned as interesting examples.

## Challenges

In our research, we have come across several challenges related to the launching of a global network for LGBTI and Queer film festivals. We have identified two main reasons why organising such a network is quite difficult. The first is related to organisational challenges (time, money, leadership). The other constraint may even be more substantial, as this is related to the substantial differences within the LGBTI and Queer film festival world.

### *Organisational challenges*

The major challenges mentioned by our survey respondents were related to time and money. One stated that *“it should not be too time-consuming. Festivals with no paid staff have no capacity to run such a network.”* Indeed, to manage such a network, a financial basis is needed. Given all the comments about this topic, this is a big deal to very many of the festivals. As mentioned before, Kashish LGBT Film Festival would like to invite all Indian LGBT Film Festivals to their 2020 edition, but they have no budget to realise such a network event in India, let alone an international network event.

Moreover, as stated before, establishing such a network requires good leadership and dedication. There may be many people qualified for these tasks, but one also needs to be really committed and perseverant. From our experience at the Human Rights Film Network, we have learned that it is hard to find (a group of) people who are not only *willing* but also *capable* of leading the network for at least one year, preferably longer. This is especially tricky since many people are working for the festival on a voluntary basis; when people leave the festival, they automatically quit the network, leaving a major void. Even the very motivated moderators of the Global LGBTQ+ Film Festival Network Facebook group have become less active after a few years, and there seems to be no one willing to step in.

This brings us to some kind of Catch-22-situation: the need for a good network seems to be stronger for smaller festivals, as they don't have (many) people working for the festival and they need the exchange with like-minded people to fill their knowledge gap, to be informed. However, smaller festivals usually do not have much time and resources to lead such a network. While the larger festivals may have more time and resources to take the lead, but for them such a (formal) network is less essential.

A related matter: we should not forget that film festival organisers are not only colleagues. They are also engaged in competition. In some parts of the world (e.g. North America) this competition may be more outspoken and fierce than in other parts, but it exists everywhere. This is related to the competitive nature of the film industry. As Olga Bauer<sup>4</sup> wrote in 2007, film festivals are *“embedded in the attention economy”*; they compete with one another for attention, status, films and funding. The film festival circuit also operates in a hierarchical way, both within countries as internationally. Some festivals have a higher status than others. Many of the larger festivals are referred to as ‘premiere festivals’. They usually require the screenings of films to be world premieres, they attract significant media attention and they are more interesting for filmmakers and other film professionals. Smaller festivals usually have fewer and ‘smaller’ premieres (regional or national premieres) and get less

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<sup>4</sup> Bauer, O. (2007). Fund-raising for film festivals in Europe. Erasmus University Rotterdam.



attention from media and film industry. This hierarchy and competition may hinder the free and equal exchange of information and knowledge.

A common language is also very important. Concretely, a well-functioning global network requires members to speak the same language. The language of cinema may be universal, but if not all festival organisers feel comfortable reading or expressing themselves in that language, these members will feel excluded. English would be the obvious choice, which would work fine in Asia, North America, Australia, and most parts of Europe and Africa, but major efforts should be made to also include festivals in former Soviet countries, China, Latin America, francophone Africa, Northern Africa and the Middle East. Language is actually one of the major problems for the Human Rights Film Network. (We expect the network would have up to 65 members if the working language would be no issue.) So to set up a network that is truly global, language differences should be taken very seriously.

### *Differences*

Speaking the same language is not only something that should be taken literally. The huge number of LGBTI and Queer film festivals – again, we expect there are more than 270 worldwide – poses a serious challenge. If 61% of those festivals would surely be interested to join a network, as our survey suggests (figure 8), it would mean 165 festivals would be willing to become a member. Finding common ground between the festivals will be demanding.

As already hinted upon earlier in this report, there are so many differences among these festivals, not only in terms of size, but also in terms of character. Within the LGBTI and Queer community there are so many different opinions, political beliefs, trends and movements, that it is practically impossible to speak about *the* LGBTI and Queer community. For instance, the term ‘queer’ can be regarded as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or are not cisgender: the term is usually intended to question every standard, norm or categorisation. Queer, therefore, is definitely not the same as LGBTI. Queer has a more ‘activist’ connotation, ‘against society’. Many individuals in the punk scene also identify as queer.

Logically these differences can also be observed in the respective film festivals. Some festivals are focused on the average (well-to-do) gay men and/or lesbian women as their main target groups, others are strongly opposed to serving these groups. For instance, whereas the driving objective for some festival organisers is to make marriage among LGBTI persons recognised in their respective society, other queer film festival organisers are opposed to the idea of gay marriage, which they perceive as a way of normalising and civilising queer individuals. Some festivals are more activist, and also believe - and articulate – that other festivals are not activist enough.

Differences among LGBTI and Queer film festivals are further enhanced by a growing awareness and emphasis on ethnic and/or cultural identity, notably in Europe and North America. At the intersection of two marginalised identities, LGBTI and queer people of colour are increasingly speaking out, advocating for their cause, emphasizing the particular problems they are facing. This trend is also perceived in the cultural realm, including film festivals. As a countermovement against the white and male-dominated ‘standard’ LGBTI film festivals, alternative LGBTI and Queer film festivals are coming up. In Europe, we have seen the establishment of several ‘queer and migrant’ film festivals. In the United States, the ‘black’ LGBTI film festivals have been on the rise since the last decade. As one festival organiser stated about a potential global LGBTI network: *“It’s important that it’s led by people of color and not white LGBTI people.”* While many festivals simply maintain their focus on gender and sexual minorities, and care less about ethnic diversity in the programme, the festival team, the audience, etc., for other festivals the inclusion of ethnic or cultural minorities is their main driving force. We noted these topics are very sensitive and may pose a complicating factor for potential cooperation.



## Conclusions

The importance of cooperation is recognised by LGBTI and Queer film festivals worldwide. Many such festivals are quite small and have limited capacity in terms of organisation and finances. Hence mainly for programming (sharing information and film suggestions) and practical matters (sharing of guests, film copies and subtitles), cooperation is needed. A great number of partnerships already exists among LGBTI and Queer film festivals worldwide, and also between them and other types of festivals. Most organisers are quite satisfied with these collaborations, and more cooperation would be appreciated.

A formal, fully global Network of LGBTI and Queer film festivals does not exist. Yet some festivals have joined in a (regional or national) network of LGBTI and Queer film festivals. The Asia-Pacific Queer Film Festival Alliance is currently the most notable and well-functioning international network. Besides, online initiatives to promote cooperation and information exchange among LGBTI and Queer Film Festivals have been launched, on social media.

Among survey respondents, there seems to be interest in joining such a global alliance, mainly to access films from other parts of the world, to share (contact) information as well as to share costs related to shipping film copies, subtitles and festival guests. Of course opinions vary about how such a network should take shape, but there are some general characteristics that most respondents seem to agree on. Ideally, the network would function as an online portal to share information and ideas, with annual face-to-face network meetings, e.g. at one of the larger LGBTI film festivals. The network should be managed through a system of rotating leadership, by highly dedicated and experienced members from within the LGBTI film community. We realise that Movies that Matter is definitely not the appropriate party to play a major role in such a development. Most festivals are willing to pay a small membership fee to cover the costs of such an alliance.

Yet we also came across several challenges. First of all, time and financial resources to launch and manage such a network are limited. Especially the larger festivals would have such resources at their disposal, but for them having a (formal) network is less essential. So, 'who takes the lead?' and 'who covers the costs?' are two essential questions that are not easily answered. Assumed hierarchy and competition among festivals is another, related matter that may hinder the free and equal exchange of information and knowledge. Moreover, a common working language is also very important for a festival to succeed; English would be a logical choice for a fully global network. Yet this may pose problems for festivals in regions where English is not the default language.

The main challenge with regards to establishing a global network is the major differentiation. There are so many different movements, positions and identities that it is hard to find common ground for all, large and small, LGBTI and Queer film festivals. An increasing amount of festivals not only focuses on sexual minorities but also strongly on ethnic and cultural identities, thereby differentiating themselves from other, more traditional LGBTI film festivals. In itself, this huge variety of festivals is highly interesting, but for network building it may prove to be a complicating factor.

All in all we conclude that there is a demand for a global network of LGBTI and Queer film festivals, but we doubt whether it is feasible. Successfully setting up and managing a professional global network, and making all potential members feel welcome, respected and included will not be easy. It will require a great deal of dedication, language skills, diplomacy and a substantial financial basis.

## Recommendations

### 1. Use existing platforms

Remarkably, some respondents indicated that a social media group would be useful, to post calls for submissions, post requests for contact of filmmakers, etc. Also, a website showing the dates of all Queer film festivals was suggested. We noted that such platforms already exist (!) but apparently not all festival organisers are aware of these opportunities.

Therefore, first and foremost we would recommend to use existing platforms that can facilitate exchange of information and ideas. To mention a few: *the Big Queer Film Festival List* is an online calendar with an overview of all Queer film festivals worldwide. *The PopcornQ Film & Video Professionals Facebook Group* is full of information for all LGBTI film and video professionals including festival organisers. Last but not least, there is the *Global LGBTQ+ Film Festival Network*, a network group on Facebook, intended for everyone working for LGBTQ+ film festivals around the world. It is an information sharing forum, a social network and a professional platform at the same time. In other words, the online platforms already exist at a certain level. We recommend that dedicated festival organisers put energy and time in (re-)developing existing platforms rather than setting up new ones.

In addition, there are many platforms facilitating cooperation and information exchange, for instance the Film Festival Alliance, Festival Focus, or the closed Facebook group called Film Festival Organizers. These initiatives are intended for all types of festivals but may be equally relevant for LGBTI and Queer Film Festivals. Also, the recently founded Programmers of Colour Collective, intended to change the underrepresentation of people of colour within film programming, could be an interesting collective for some festival organisers to join.

### 2. Launch regional or thematic networks

To overcome some of the challenges described in this report, such as language barriers, we could imagine that festivals would like to formally unite themselves in smaller networks. These alliances could be based on a specific region or sub-theme, for instance.

LGBTI identities and their related challenges greatly differ per country and culture. Cultural differences partly define the differences in programming preferences, possibilities and impossibilities (censorship). This not only regards certain sensitive aspects of a film, like nudity, erotic scenes or political statements, it also applies to culturally defined cinematographic preferences. In other words, screening a film that is a must-see in one place can pose insurmountable problems in another part of the world, and can be uninteresting in yet another region. Although these cultural differences do not create a major impediment for establishing a network, they may reduce a global network's value and efficiency.

Regional networks are likely to overcome (part of) these cultural barriers as well as language obstacles, reduce time zone differences and facilitate face-to-face meetings.

We suggest to take a look at the Asia-Pacific Queer Film Festival Alliance, or the UK-based Queer Film Network, as successful examples. Smaller networks reduce the size of the network, allowing for better and more personal contact.

It may not sound as an ideal situation to launch regional alliances, such as a European Queer Film Festival Network for instance, as this will by definition exclude all non-European festivals, including those at Europe's borders. On the other hand, in our opinion a global network is not a feasible alternative.

### 3. Create ad hoc partnerships

Realising the desire of festivals to cooperate, and given the challenges described, of course festivals can also join forces ad hoc, without any formal partnership. Moreover, cooperation with other (non-LGBTI or Queer) film festivals is possible. When festivals or cultural initiatives have a common interest, e.g. in terms of dates, film programme, or location, we would recommend to establish good relations. Costs of film transport, subtitles, guests or publicity can be shared, for instance. (For instance, Movies that Matter Festival in The Hague has good and reliable working relations with Human Rights Watch Film Festival in London, FIFDH in Geneva, and Pink Film Days in Amsterdam. Although the cooperation is not necessarily formalised in a network, the festivals make functional agreements in terms of cost sharing.) Ad hoc cooperation is a flexible and efficient form of collaboration.

## Annex: Survey

This is the text of the survey that was sent out on 12 December 2019.

### Introduction text:

Hi there,

Would you, as representative of XXX, be willing to answer a few questions about cooperation among festivals?

Movies that Matter supports film screenings and debates about human rights all over the world. We promote the exchange of information and encourage cooperation among festivals. Currently we're making a quick scan about cooperation among *LGBTI film festivals / Queer film festivals*. We'd like to identify whether there is a need for strengthening festival cooperation and if so, what this cooperation would entail. We hope that many organisers of professional LGBTI / Queer film festivals, such as XXX, can help us.

Therefore we would like to ask you a few questions, and invite you to fill out the following questionnaire. By answering these questions, you are not only helping us tremendously, you also have a chance to win an accreditation to an LGBTI / Queer film festival of your choice. Depending on your answers, this will take about 3-5 minutes. Your responses will be anonymised in our analysis.

### Questions:

1.

Does your festival currently cooperate with other festivals?

2.

How does that cooperation look like, in practice? Do you, for instance, share film suggestions, discuss the programme, negotiate screening licenses together, share guests, share fundraising, or other matters?

3.

With which other festivals do you cooperate?

- another Queer / LGBTI film festival in your own country
- another type of film festival in your own country
- another Queer / LGBTI film festival in the same continent / region
- another type of film festival in the same continent / region
- another Queer / LGBTI film festival in another part of the world
- another type of film festival in another part of the world

4.

Are you interested in having more cooperation with other festivals?

If yes:

What are your desires and expectations with regards to (potential) cooperation?

If no:

Why not?

5.

Is your festival already a member of any, formal or informal, international network with other festivals?

Yes/no

➔ Yes: Which network?

➔ No: Would you be interested in being member of an international LGBTI / Queer festival network?

Yes/no

6.

What are the (potential) benefits of being member of an international network, according to you?

7.

Would you prefer being part of a regional network (e.g. European, African) or a globally operating network?

8.

Do you have any ideas about how such a network should look like? Should this network have an online portal/website? Will it be a group on social media? Do you want to have face-to-face meetings, for instance at one of the larger LGBTI film festivals? Or online meetings? Who should take the lead in establishing such a network, and who should run it? Will members need to pay membership fees?