



# “Profile of the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia participant. Qualitative research” Research report

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## **I. Introduction. Origins and nature of research, project course.**

The main objective of the project was to conduct research on participation in culture from a specific perspective - the behaviours and preferences of the participant of the Polish Film Festival. The aim was to expand knowledge about the participants of the festival, their activities, preferences and expectations regarding the program and organization of the Polish Film Festival, and also their ways of participating in culture and their behaviours. Through survey research, we wanted to determine the profile of the participant/event tourist, attitudes towards new media and new ways of participating in culture, as well as communication channels for the marketing of cultural goods and services. The evaluation of the program and organization of the Polish Film Festival, as well as its individual sections, is extremely important, as it facilitates the evaluation of the whole festival. The project is interdisciplinary in its nature. It uses the achievements of empirical studies on the creative sector and research on the spatial dimension of the creative sector. On the other hand, it is a scientific project from the area of a new and dynamically developing trend in film literature called production studies, as well as from specific trends of "festival studies" and "event studies".

Extensive qualitative research was conducted on a group of 59 festival participants selected according to the audience cross-section determined during previous editions of the study. The method we used was individual in-depth interviews (semi-structured), using open questions ("how?", "why?"), which allowed respondents to answer freely. The structure of the interview was determined by a list of topics, but the order of questions was flexible. Supplementary questions were asked during the conversation.

As part of the qualitative study, 59 individual in-depth interviews were conducted. The majority of respondents were women (F: 40, M: 19). The vast majority (85%) of the study participants were people with higher education. The largest group were respondents aged 46-55 (30.5%), and the smallest were people over 55 (10.2%). There were 10 respondents aged 18-25 (16.9%), while 15 were aged 26-35 (25.4%). The vast majority of the study participants were working people (83.1%), but we also managed to talk to students (11.9%), retirees or pensioners (3.4%), and one unemployed person.

All interviews were conducted during the 49th PFF in Gdynia on September 23-28, 2024. In the fall and winter, the data analysis stage took place (transcription, coding, interpretation) and a report was prepared on their basis. The public presentation of the research results took place on February 13, 2025 in an online formula, which was preceded by intensive promotion (publications on websites, in social media, sending invitations to newsletter recipients).

From quantitative research conducted in 2018-2023, we managed to determine the profile of the PFF audience. The young audience dominates - half are people under 35, well-educated and quite well-off. 1/3 of the audience comes from Gdynia, 1/2 from the Tri-City, the rest mainly from 4 large cities in Poland. This means that contrary to the stereotype, this is not an



industry festival, but an audience festival. Regulars (present at least five times at the PFF) make up almost 1/4 of the participants. 1/3 of the respondents are PFF debutants. According to the declarations, the average festival participant in 2023 spent PLN 2,203.52.



*photo by Piotr Żagiell*

## II. Role of the Festival in the Participant's life

***Why do you decide to come to the Polish Film Festival? What attracts you to the festival? What benefits do you see in participating in the festival? How does the festival affect your personal film experiences? What makes the Polish Film Festival unique compared to other film festivals? Is there anything in particular you expect from this festival? How does participating in the festival differ from simply going to the cinema?***

The Gdynia festival attracts viewers for various reasons, but the most frequently mentioned are: love of cinema, its unique atmosphere and the tradition of coming to the festival. Many participants value the festival for its wide selection of films, including productions that are difficult to watch in cinemas. Some come because they are attached to Gdynia and the Tri-City, others treat the event as a permanent element of their annual plans. There was also a theme of childhood experiences and their influence on the decision to participate - when they were at school, viewers took part in the children's section, which influenced the decision to buy an accreditation or a pass later in their lives. For many people, the festival has become a passion to which they have devoted their time for years, and some came here while they were still at school and continue to do so. Some participants value the atmosphere of the festival, the opportunity to meet filmmakers, and in-depth discussions about films with other festival participants. Some treat the festival as an extension of their holidays or an important point in their cultural calendar. Older viewers appreciate the opportunity to actively participate in culture after retirement. For others, it is a dream come true – they have been watching the festival for years and finally decided to come. For many people, the location is also important – Gdynia and its seaside surroundings add charm to the whole event. For some viewers, it is also an opportunity to catch up on Polish cinema, with which they have less contact on a daily basis. The Festival offers intense film experiences, closeness to the world of cinema and filmmakers, as well as a unique character that makes you want to come back.

Participating in the FPFF in Gdynia gives you the opportunity to watch many Polish films before their premieres, which allows you to better orient yourself to upcoming premieres. The Festival enriches your film knowledge, provides inspiration and encourages you to reflect on cinema. Meetings with filmmakers help you better understand films and get to know their backstage. The event encourages making friends with other film enthusiasts, and some participants meet the same people here every year. The Festival offers a variety of feature films by directors from all over the country, combining tradition with modern cinema. Some treat it as a way to experience culture together and participate in the film community. For many participants, it is simply a pleasant time that does not require looking for specific benefits.

The Festival undoubtedly influences the participants, providing them with intense emotions and reflection on films or their own lives. It allows them to discover new forms of narrative and changes taking place in Polish cinema, which gives a sense of participation in its evolution. Many viewers started watching more Polish films than before, appreciating domestic

filmmakers. Some participants emphasize that the Festival gives them a chance for unexpected film discoveries that they would not normally experience. The Festival atmosphere makes the viewers feel like they are part of an important cultural event. This event often changes the participants' approach to film and strengthens their passion for film.

The Festival in Gdynia stands out for its unique location – the proximity of the sea, the September weather and the (still) holiday climate give it an exceptional character. Another important element is the atmosphere created by the participants – filmmakers, the industry and film enthusiasts, who together build a unique experience. The key aspect is the focus on Polish cinema and a wide selection of (mostly) premiere films, which allows for in-depth tracking of changes in the national cinematography. Viewers also appreciate the opportunity to see the latest Polish productions in one place. Some participants see the need for greater audience involvement. Compared to other events, Gdynia offers a more intimate atmosphere and a condensed program.

Participating in the Polish Film Festival differs from a regular going to the cinema, primarily in terms of the atmosphere, sense of community and uniqueness of the event. The Festival is not only about watching films, but also the opportunity to meet with filmmakers, participate in discussions, and experience cinema in a more engaging way. Viewers feel that they are part of this world, and their opinions, e.g. by choosing the winner of the Audience Award, have real significance. Unlike a standard cinema screening, here the audience is aware and involved - they do not come by chance, but most often out of passion for film. The screenings are more intense - films are watched one after another, which can be physically tiring, but at the same time it draws and engages the viewer. The event is accompanied by a sense of exclusivity, especially when there are actors or directors next to the viewers. The Festival atmosphere also includes exhibitions and accompanying events that enrich the experience. Ultimately, it is a celebration of cinema, which allows not only to watch films, but also to experience them, analyze them and co-create the film reality.

Most respondents do not have any particular expectations regarding the festival, considering its current form satisfactory. However, there are voices regarding the difficulties in booking seats on the first day and the postponement of the festival to "later September", which may affect weather conditions and the comfort of participants. Some viewers would like more variety in the repertoire, especially a greater presence of genre films such as thrillers, crime films or comedies, which are appreciated at international festivals. It is also important to ensure a wide range of films, to avoid the impression of repetition and to maintain thematic diversity. Another aspect that would be desirable is the presence of emotionally engaging films, which not only settle accounts with the past, but also provide a new perspective on the future.

*I totally fell in love with this atmosphere, the films, the whole organization, so I will definitely go every year.*

*The atmosphere is the filmmakers and the people who organize this festival, so I would probably say it is intimate, because that is how I treat it, in terms of the closeness to the filmmakers and even the size of the screening room and so on.*

*I watched it the whole 90s, the whole early 2000s, and because this festival is and was very present in the media, I had this very conviction that it is more for the industry, not for the viewers. Last year, however, I finally decided to come, see what it looks like, and after last year's experience, I like this atmosphere, this climate here so much that I decided that I will come this year too.*

*When I was in high school, I was in a film class and my homeroom teacher would take us to school screenings, and we would go together as a class. And we went together for the entire three years of high school. And when I finished high school, I liked the atmosphere of this festival so much that I decided that even though I was no longer in that class, I would like to take part in it. And I bought my first accreditation, seven years ago. I can't imagine even one year without the festival.*

*I feel like I'm part of a very important event. I learn a lot here, it's also a kind of meeting myself, a look inside myself.*

*First of all, it's some kind of idea, community and way of being, functioning.*

*If someone hasn't been here, they can't even imagine it.*

*What I love most about this festival is that in one week, I can feel like I'm actually a part of this world. Because somewhere in high school, it was always my dream to go to film school to study acting.*

*And the volunteers, the reservations, and the fact that friends come here, I cross paths with someone here, I meet and talk to someone there, or we meet and eat breakfast together. I'm definitely in the throes of excitement, curiosity – a nice, warm atmosphere.*





*photo by Anna Bobrowska / KFP*

### III. Organization of the Festival, program, ecological aspects.

***How do you assess the organization of the festival and what organizational aspects are most important to you? What events, apart from the Main Competition, are most interesting to you and why? What innovations in the organization of the festival have you noticed that could increase interest in festival events? What do you think should be improved in the organization of the festival to increase its attractiveness to participants? Are there specific topics or film genres that you are particularly interested in during the festival? If so, which ones?***

Most respondents assessed the organization of the festival very positively, emphasizing good communication and clarity of information. The involvement of volunteers and the availability of screenings in various locations, which allows for flexible planning, are also praised. However, some participants point out problems with the application, especially on the first day of booking tickets, when the system is sometimes overloaded. There are also voices regarding the difficulties resulting from different locations - some preferred the former, more concentrated location of the events. Some people believe that the pace of the festival is too fast, which makes it difficult to participate in meetings with filmmakers. Critical comments also concern the atmosphere of some places - for example, the location of some screenings in a shopping mall, which does not favour the atmosphere of the festival. There was also a postulate for better organization of registration (e-mail), so that participants receive short, clear instructions on the process of buying accreditation and making a reservation. The festival is appreciated for its evolution and opening up to a wider audience, which means that it is no longer just an industry event. Despite minor technical and organizational issues, the overall assessment of the festival remains very favourable.

The participants of the festival most often indicated the Short Film Competition as the most interesting events outside the Main Competition. However, they regret that they often do not have time to watch films from this section, and there are also few screenings. Many respondents also value the new Perspectives section, noticing its value for young filmmakers and its original approach to cinema. Meetings with filmmakers and actors were another frequently mentioned event that enriches the festival experience. Some participants are keen to watch classic Polish cinema, emphasizing the unique opportunity to see older films on the big screen. There were also voices appreciating documentaries and thematic blocks. Some people do not participate in the accompanying events, focusing solely on film screenings. Some respondents mentioned logistic problems that make it difficult to participate in additional events. In general, however, the diversity of festival proposals was met with a positive reception.

It was suggested that making the films available online with special links could increase interest in the festival. In response to the lack of time to watch the films in the short films section, it was suggested to devote one or two days exclusively to short films before the Main Competition starts, or to make them accessible online after the festival. This arrangement could make it easier for viewers to get to know the short films, despite the focus on the main festival screenings. This idea could also help to better organize the participants' time and increase the visibility of short films.

The need for better signage of festival locations was indicated, especially in the Riviera Shopping Centre. Another problem is the too short breaks between screenings and the insufficient number of seats for popular screenings. The need for a wider gastronomic offer was reported - food trucks or snacks in the café at Helios Cinema. Some postulated extending the festival by additional days to be able to see more films. It was proposed to create a space for watching the Closing Ceremony together. Additional problems concerned the content of packages, lack of parking spaces, uncomfortable seats in screening rooms - especially in the Musical Theatre (New Stage).

*I am focused on the Main Competition, although because of the fact that the Main Competition starts on Monday evening, during that day I always watch two or three blocks of short films. This is also a very interesting competition and interesting cinema, I also participate in it. Next year I am thinking whether not to divide my time between some films from the Main Competition and from this new section called Perspectives, it used to be a micro budget section. There are often very good films there, and I am usually focused on the Main Competition.*

*This is also a question of choosing films for the festival, it is a completely separate matter. We can discuss it, but maybe there should be, so to speak, an incentive in this direction, to attract young viewers. I don't know why it has been assumed, for example, that comedies are not appropriate to present in Gdynia. Why not? There was a great comedy last year (...) - "Horror Story". It was a comedy, but it concerned important issues, especially for young people; and it was very well done.*

*The Closing Gala is a huge experience. Whenever I watch it at home, I always feel like: "I was there all week, and now I'm sitting at home watching this". And it seems to me that if we could meet up with everyone in the screening room, watch the broadcast of the gala that's happening right next door, or just outside, like there used to be film screenings, it would be a great experience. And I just imagine, I don't know, the emotions like at a match, that people would be commenting to each other that... "No, no, no, that film!" There would simply be some kind of discussion and there would be an even greater sense of unity.*

***Do you pay attention to ecological initiatives during festivals? Which ones do you notice? Which pro-ecological activities are the most important to you? Would the introduction of eco-solutions influence your decision to participate in the festival? Why? What innovative eco-solutions would you like to see at the future editions of the festival?***

Many respondents see the need for ecological initiatives and try to pay attention to it on a daily basis. However, the approach to such activities at festivals is sometimes sceptical. Some people believe that ecological actions are often of an image-building nature and do not always result from genuine concern for the environment. They lack specific information about the real impact of these activities. Some perceive such initiatives as a marketing ploy, which may give the impression that participants are in some way "bribed" with symbolic "trendy" actions. Despite this, they do not accuse the organizers of bad intentions, although they remain neutral towards such activities. During the festival, participants noticed various pro-ecological

initiatives. Many people paid attention to tree planting and certificates confirming participation in this action. Another popular solution was limiting printed materials - fewer paper festival programs and catalogues. The possibility of renting bikes as an ecological means of transport was assessed positively. Waste segregation and the availability of fabric bags instead of plastic ones were also appreciated. The introduction of water fountains allowing people to fill their own bottles was another pro-ecological step. Some expressed scepticism, pointing to elements of greenwashing and the marketing nature of the initiatives. Despite this, most participants noticed positive changes and believed that the festival is trying to be more ecological. The tree-planting campaign was initiative that was the most frequently noticed by respondents.

The respondents suggested various innovative eco-solutions that could be introduced at the festival. The need for electric transport, such as buses, and better marking of water bottle filling points were indicated. Many participants stressed the need to reduce the use of paper materials, such as brochures, newspapers and leaflets, suggesting their digitization. There was an idea for digital badges and passes, with the option to choose between physical and electronic versions. Others drew attention to the problem of excess plastic packaging at banquets. Some suggested that the forest promoted by the festival should be better documented visually, e.g. by updating the commercials or labelling the trees with the names of films. The location of some events in a shopping mall was also criticized, which was considered to be contrary to the idea of ecology ("encouraging" consumerism). The idea of creating a space for conscious disposal of festival souvenirs aroused mixed feelings, as some participants want to keep them. In general, more thoughtful and visible actions for ecology were postulated. In general, however, ecological issues are not the main criterion for participants when choosing an event.

*It seems to me that on the one hand it is image-related; these campaigns are often only for image-related purposes and we do not really care about how many trees have actually been planted. We do not have any information anywhere, it is not important for them to tell us how many trees they have planted within this action. Here we give a gift because there is a tree and I have this feeling that I am being bribed.*

*And the contents of this bag are also a bit unrelated to this idea of ecology, because I have the impression that, for example, a year ago we received much fewer newspapers and things like that and then it actually made sense. And this year again there was a package of three newspapers, millions of leaflets, little notebooks, and everything. If we minimized it, I think it would be eco-friendlier.*

*You can notice that one of the trends in which the festival promotes itself is that it tries to be pro-ecological, tries to be green, and that it minimizes printed materials, tickets. Indeed, it looks that there are fewer paper programs.*

*The idea was that we could also do something green.*



*photo by Piotr Żagiell*



#### IV. Transformations of the audience. Pandemic and technological changes.

***How did the pandemic affect your personal approach to attending cultural events? Have you noticed any changes in the atmosphere, organization, and interactions between festival participants after the pandemic? What are your general feelings about attending festivals after the pandemic compared to previous years?***

The impact of the pandemic on participation in cultural events was varied. Some respondents claimed that restrictions influenced their social contacts and casual conversations, which affected the atmosphere of the festival. Some people noticed that, after the pandemic, the festival community became more close-knit and enthusiastically returned to events. Others, however, avoided this type of activity for a longer period of time or were less culturally active, although not necessarily directly due to the pandemic. For some, the return to normality was immediate - as soon as the restrictions were lifted, they were eager to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in events. There were also those who still go out less often, e.g. to the cinema or theatre, but plan to change it.

Some people did not notice any major differences in the festival, believing that it had returned to its previous form. There was joy in returning to normality. One noticeable aspect was the greater sensitivity of participants to symptoms of illness - coughing or sneezing caused more agitation. Differences in the organization were pointed out compared to previous years, when getting a good seat required standing in long lines ("that it had its own atmosphere").

There were also opinions that the pandemic had an impact on the film market, including the greater availability of festival films on streaming platforms, which changed the way they were perceived. It was also pointed out that the pandemic influenced viewers' habits - some people got used to watching films at home and visit cinemas less often.

***What is your opinion on the growing popularity of streaming platforms compared to traditional cinemas? Do you prefer traditional participation in a festival or do you appreciate the possibility of remote participation? What are the benefits of attending a physical film festival compared to watching films online? What do you think about hybrid film festivals? What do you prefer - watching films in a cinema or at home? Why?***

Respondents have different opinions on the growing popularity of streaming platforms compared to traditional cinemas. Some see streaming platforms as complementary to cinema, and not a replacement for it, emphasizing their role in expanding the availability of films. Others point out that although film streaming is convenient, not everything can be watched on a laptop screen - the cinema experience remains irreplaceable. However, some people notice a negative impact of such platforms on cinema attendance, noting that they go to them less often, especially to watch Polish films. There is also an opinion that festivals and streaming platforms are two different spaces - festivals offer a unique atmosphere that cannot be recreated at home. Some respondents appreciate the fact that festival films are available on platforms, which increases their viewership and availability. It was also noted that streaming can

be a complement to festivals. Some people expressed sadness about the closure of cinemas and fear that the cheap and easily accessible streaming offer may negatively affect cinema culture. At the same time, there was hope that younger generations, more aware of the value of interpersonal relationships, will bring cinema back into fashion. Some see streaming as an opportunity to popularize Polish cinema, which often loses out to foreign productions in cinemas. Most respondents consider streaming to be an important element of contemporary film culture, but at the same time do not believe that it will completely replace cinemas.

Most respondents prefer watching films in the cinema because of the atmosphere, image and sound quality, as well as the ability to fully focus on the screening. For many people, the cinema is a unique experience that cannot be replaced by watching films at home. Some respondents treat going to the cinema as a ritual and celebration, emphasizing the magic of the big screen and the lack of distractions present at home. However, some other respondents admit that they often use streaming platforms due to the convenience, availability, and cost of tickets. There are people who choose the cinema only for specific films, e.g. artistic ones, requiring more concentration or unavailable online. Some prefer arthouse cinemas to multiplexes, avoiding commercial productions. There are also people who rarely go to the cinema because they believe that watching films at home is equally important these days. For some respondents, finances are a limitation, so they choose cheaper days in cinemas or the option of renting films online. Some respondents see the advantages of both forms of watching films, adapting their choice to the situation and type of film.

Most respondents prefer traditional participation in the festival and cannot imagine its online version as a full-fledged experience. They emphasize that watching films in the cinema while being surrounded by other people is a key element of the event, and that it creates a unique atmosphere and allows for making new friends. For many, the festival is not only about films, but also about interactions with filmmakers and other viewers, which an online version lacks. Some respondents emphasize that the festival has something of a "feast" or "sacred" about it, which makes it irreplaceable in the stationary form. At the same time, several people see the advantages of the hybrid option, especially for people who cannot participate live, e.g. due to disability, illness, or distance. Some respondents fear that introducing the hybrid option may mean that filmmakers will come to the festival less often and participate remotely instead. Although some people can see practical benefits of the hybrid model, the vast majority of respondents prefer the traditional, stationary form of the festival.

*Cinema, of course cinema. It's something, it's such magic.*

*Because it's simply different when you are surrounded by people and watch a film with them. And that should be the idea of the festival, that we come to get to know these people a little, get to know the actors, get to know the filmmakers. Even if you don't talk to them, just, I don't know, seeing them somewhere is great, that you actually see the people who created this film,*

*so I think that the hybrid version is a bit pointless in my opinion, because I can watch the film at home, right? And I go to the festival to get out of my house, to share this experience.*

*There are advantages of an easy access to films and everything, but from my own experience, I go to the cinema much less, as if they are eating up cinema a bit; and I have to admit it a bit stupidly that after this festival I hardly ever go the cinema to watch Polish films. Unless there is a big film, then I go, but it is as if the festival “takes care of” it for me (...). I also noticed that these festival films are already being streamed. Knowing that I would be at festival, I did not watch them on purpose, because there is a different atmosphere and a different reception of films at festival. However, I think that [streaming platforms] have a great influence on the fact that people go to the cinema less. However, they also produce very good films. I mean, some of them. Yes, some films are very good and there is also a great access to films.*



*photo by Piotr Żagiell*

## V. Impact of the Festival on the city

***What are the biggest advantages of the seaside location of the festival? Is the location of the festival in seaside Gdynia and access to the beach important to you during your festival stay? Is the festival an opportunity for you to discover other cultural and tourist attractions in Gdynia/Tricity? Does the location of the festival affect your involvement in its events and activities? Do residents gain or lose because of the festival?***

The location of the festival in the seaside city of Gdynia raises various opinions, but most respondents do notice its unique character. Some consider the proximity of the sea to be a huge advantage, emphasizing its influence on the atmosphere of the event and the possibility of resting between screenings. Some people compare the festival to a holiday trip, appreciating the unique atmosphere and space. However, some respondents admit that the intensive schedule of the festival limits the time to explore the seaside charms of Gdynia. At the same time, they emphasize that the city itself is perfectly adapted to organize the event, offering convenient infrastructure and proximity to the festival venues. Some people treat Gdynia as an integral part of the festival, considering that its relocation to another city would negatively affect its identity. Others point to practical benefits, such as access to gastronomy and local attractions. There are also very few voices that although the festival in Gdynia has its charm, for some its seaside location is of no great importance. Despite the diverse opinions, most respondents appreciate the unique character of the festival resulting from its location.

Some participants of the festival use it as an opportunity to discover other cultural and tourist attractions in Gdynia and the Tri-City, visiting theatres, museums and other events. Some people pay attention to the availability of information materials that make it easier to get to know new places. Others focus solely on watching films and do not take advantage of additional attractions during the festival.

Some festival tourists come to Gdynia in other months as well, although for some the city remains mainly a festival location. There are people who have sentimental feelings for the city, also because of other cultural events, such as Open'er Festival. Some are considering returning, e.g. to the Musical Theatre. Others, however, believe that the festival week is enough for them.

Most respondents believe that Gdynia residents benefit from the festival. They point to the economic benefits, especially for the catering, hotel and service industries, as well as the promotion of the city in the country and abroad. They emphasize that the festival brings life to Gdynia, attracts tourists and creates a unique atmosphere that residents can also enjoy, even without accreditation. Some point to the possibility of participating in festival events and access to valuable cinema and meetings with filmmakers without having to travel to other cities. Among the few sceptical voices, there is an opinion that the festival is not sufficiently visible in the urban space and, interestingly, not all residents are aware of its existence. Some

respondents note that, unlike other large events, the film festival does not cause traffic and noise disruptions, and therefore does not negatively affect the quality of life. The role of the festival in strengthening Gdynia's position as a film city is also emphasized, which additionally contributes to its prestige. Some respondents indicate that the event may have a long-term impact on the development of the city, both in a cultural and urban context.

*The festival is associated with Gdynia. And I think it is in my heart, as a Gdynia resident, I think that it is a very large part of our identity. This atmosphere, the fact that the festival is here, those beaten paths that have become a tradition, it should not be changed. Because the festival would also lose its identity.*

*Neither in Wroclaw nor Warsaw, because I associate these cities with similar festivals, there is such an atmosphere like in Gdynia. Especially at this time of year, with this weather.*

*Although the atmosphere is probably created by the filmmakers and the people who organize this festival.*

*A year ago, I was surprised when I went for dinner after a film, it was here in the centre, on Starowiejska Street. Someone asked me "Excuse me, what's going on here, that people are walking around with badges?" I said "There's a film festival in Gdynia." And I remember the lady behind the bar was like: "What's that?" I thought to myself, you live in Gdynia, you work in the centre of Gdynia, and you don't know what's going on now. It was really surprising to me; how can you not know that something like this is happening. It was a bit of a reality check that not everyone lives this week the way I live, let's say, that my whole head is simply wrapped around this festival.*





*photo by Piotr Żagiell*

## VI. Promotion and sources of the information about the Festival

***How did you find out about the festival? Which source of information was the most important to you? What promotional materials did you use to plan your visit to the festival (e.g. mobile app, printed program, website)? What made you choose these materials? What information was the hardest for you to find before the festival? What were your expectations regarding information about the festival before attending the event? Were these expectations met? What forms of promotion of the festival did you find most compelling or interesting? What particularly caught your attention? Are there any aspects of the festival that could be better promoted or presented to increase your engagement?***

Many respondents had known about the Festival for years – some had learned about it from friends, family, or through their interest in cinema. Some people first encountered information about the Festival on television, cinema, or radio. Social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, played an important role in accessing up-to-date information. Many people also used Internet portals such as Trójmiasto.pl and followed the events via TVP Kultura and TVP Info. Some actively sought information on their own, others noticed a problem with the availability of information before the Festival. Attention was drawn to the improvement in communication in recent years, especially in social media and on the Festival website. However, the “dead” periods after the event and the lack of broad promotion before it began were criticised. Some respondents had the impression that Festival was unavailable for people outside the film industry, although they later found out that anyone could take part in it. Banners and local advertisements were only noticed in the festival venue, which indicates limited nationwide promotion. For many people, the most important thing was the information about accreditations and the schedule of events. The Festival is especially important for people related to film professionally, but it also attracts a wide audience through various communication channels.

Respondents used various promotional materials to plan their visit to the festival, but the most common were the mobile app, the website, and the paper program. The app was convenient and sufficient for some participants, but not all respondents downloaded it – interestingly, some (relatively few, but still) were unaware of its existence. The website was widely used for booking and viewing the schedule, although some respondents noted its division into two separate sections, which made it difficult to use. The paper program was popular, especially among those who liked to take notes and plan on a physical version of the schedule. Some lamented the lack of festival catalogues, which were previously standard for accredited participants. Social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, were an additional source of information, and some people also followed the film press and industry portals such as filmpolski.pl. Some respondents suggested that the app could better integrate all the information to make it easier to navigate the festival. Among those who preferred online materials, downloading the schedule in PDF format was popular. Attention was also drawn to the need for easy access to full information about films and competitions. Despite their different preferences, most people combined several sources of information to best plan their festival visit.

Respondents indicated several difficulties related to accessing information before the festival. Some people had trouble finding the schedule – it was published late, and earlier access to it would have made planning easier. Some pointed out the lack of consistency between the layout of the paper program and the version in the app. The availability of information about the types of accreditations and tickets was also problematic – for some participants it was not clear what rights a given option gave. People not associated with the film industry noticed that the promotion of the festival was limited – advertisements were visible mainly in selected places in Gdynia, and apart from them it was difficult to find information, especially if someone did not follow social media. Some respondents emphasized that the festival could provide better information about accompanying events. A problem with Facebook algorithms was also indicated – it did not always display festival posts. On the other hand, other respondents stated that all the necessary information was available and intuitive to find.

The most convincing forms of promotion of the festival are the mobile application and Instagram which effectively reaches the appropriate community of users. The aesthetic graphics and the effective festival intro also attracted participants' attention. Additionally, large and capacious promotional bags aroused positive interest. An important factor influencing the reception of the event was also its rank and prestige.

The respondents had different expectations regarding information about the festival before it started. The importance of social media was emphasized as a key source of information. There was also a suggestion regarding a map with recommended accommodations and restaurants (including discounts for participants). Some participants expected the programme and schedule of events to be published much earlier in order to be able to plan their participation better, especially in the context of professional obligations. The stability of the website and mobile application was also an important aspect, especially on the first day of the festival. Meeting these basic expectations was considered necessary, while exceeding them would be an additional advantage. Attention was drawn to the small number of advertising campaigns in social media, especially on Instagram, and the insufficient number of promotional materials in the urban space, especially outside Gdynia. There was a suggestion to promote meetings with actors and interviews more, because they are attractive to viewers. The need to organize additional events for viewers, not only for the industry, was also emphasized, in order to better build the festival community (e.g. outdoor screenings).

*I expected the program and information to be out sooner, so I could plan everything, already in adulthood I have to function like an adult, a working person, so that would be easier. And I always hope on Monday, the first day of festival, that the website or the app won't crash. That's the minimum, and if we go over it, I'd be very happy.*

*I use everything. I have both the app and the paper program, and I always come with my laptop and book online. The website is cool, although it would be more convenient if it was all together, and not two separate websites.*

*The Instagram user community seems to me to be the most suitable for promotion.*

*It seems that this festival is promoted in a rather closed bubble and it may not be popular among, let's say, people who are not very interested in cinema. Maybe if someone lives here in Gdynia it of course may be different, but I don't know if people from other cities know and hear a lot about it, so maybe the promotion can be expanded in this way to reach others, the people who simply like film but are not that interested in it.*

*Positively, [the festival] is well visible in Gdynia. Outside Gdynia, probably not.*

## VII. Conclusions and the recommendations

The Festival is perceived primarily as a ritual – for many PFF participants it is an annual mandatory point in their calendar, fulfilling a socio-cultural function. They emphasize the difference between Festival cinema and “everyday cinema” – Festival screenings are an intense experience, building a sense of community and emotional involvement. The PFF is not only about films – it is the feeling of being part of the film world, which distinguishes it from other events. Viewers are drawn to the Festival by the love of cinema, its unique atmosphere, but also by a wide selection of films, including productions that are difficult to watch in cinemas and meetings with their makers. The PFF is also a permanent element of annual plans, an extension of the holidays, and sometimes even the fulfilment of dreams.

Currently, the Polish Film Festival is aimed more at viewers than at the industry – although the event gathers filmmakers, the main group of respondents consists of conscious, loyal viewers. It should be emphasized that viewers of the Festival consistently rate the level of the program and organization of the event, the commitment of the organizers, and especially the volunteers. They like Polish cinema and appreciate the opportunity to watch most of the Polish premieres at the same time and in a community atmosphere, in the presence of the filmmakers, meetings with whom they particularly value. It is worth paying attention to two groups of viewers: seniors, who are increasingly active at the festival, whose time in retirement allows them to participate freely, and young people who came across “Gdynia for Children” section when they were children and today they buy a pass or accreditation for the PFF.

Gdynia is a key element of the PFF atmosphere; festival tourists come here also because of the unique charm of the city, which, in the opinion of the participants, is very well prepared to host the event. Some of the interviewees noted that although Gdynia is an integral part of festival, many residents are not aware of its existence or activities, so perhaps a better integration of festival with the urban space would be useful.

Polish viewers invariably love genre cinema, especially comedies, and so do participants of the Polish Film Festival. Selectors should pay attention to the fact that viewers' expectations go beyond art cinema (they emphasize the lack of genre cinema, such as thrillers, crime stories, comedies). When it comes to organizational issues, the booking application causes some frustration. Viewers postulate improving the booking system and the screening infrastructure. The location of screenings in the Riviera Shopping Centre does not favour the festival atmosphere – but it is difficult to find another location at the moment. It would be good to strengthen accompanying events section that deepen the viewers' experience. Some respondents suggested restoring, for example, outdoor screenings, or organizing a joint viewing of the Closing Gala in a screening room. Since the Polish Film Festival has been vigorously implementing the principles of sustainable development in recent years, it is worth noting that participants appreciate pro-ecological initiatives, but are sensitive to their marketing dimension. However,



they appreciate their practical dimension, such as free bicycles, public transport, tree planting, and easy access to drinking water.

Viewers use a variety of promotional materials to plan their festival visit, but the most common ones are the mobile app, the website, and the printed program. Social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, are additional sources of information. Despite their different preferences, most people combined several sources of information to best plan their festival visit.



*photo by Anna Bobrowska / KFP*

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