

Film Recipes for Mental Health: Film Therapy Sessions

Interview with Indré Malecké, Cinema Center Romuva (Kaunas, Lithuania),
by Vincent Leleurch

Using film to heal the impact of recent and current crises: that's the ambition of this project, developed in three countries.



Hall of Cinema ARTA in Cluj-Napoca, Romania © Cinema ARTA

Why did you choose to launch this project?

The European Union and the wider world have, in the last few years, undergone unprecedented crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic, military conflicts, energy crisis and inflation, all of which have shaken everyday reality, expectations, and the confidence of people, resulting in major impact on the mental health of both individuals and society. As well as reflecting society's values, cinema is a powerful contributor to personal health and wellbeing, and it can overcome language barriers and convey inner emotions. European cinemas have all the tools needed to implement film therapy sessions, thus bringing European cinema to new audiences (attracted by the therapeutic side of screening), improving global emotional health, and thus positioning cinema as more than just entertainment.

However, cinema therapy is still an unfamiliar field for a large portion of the public and is only applied in isolated organisations or health facilities. Despite proven effectiveness in promoting mental health and emotional wellbeing, film therapy remains on the periphery of cinema initiatives.

Can you describe the project?

The Project "Film Recipes for Mental Health" will be implemented in three cinemas: Kaunas Cinema Center Romuva (Lithuania), Astor Cinema (Greece), and Cinema ARTA (Romania). This project aims to broaden the understanding of how cinemas can promote European cinema while enhancing emotional and mental health. By proposing new activities and creating sustainable relationships with audiences, we plan to conduct

30 film therapy sessions across three partner countries, led by psychologists and featuring European films addressing social and psychological themes. Additionally, we will organize 30 stop-motion animation workshops, "Recipes for Emotional Health," to engage participants in the history and techniques of animation. Finally, we will create a "Film Recipe Book," where participants analyse films through the lens of emotional impact, sharing recommendations and personal insights with others.

What was the need for it in your city / country?

There have been many studies on the worsening of psychological health. This project is therefore needed to meet the growing demand for creative and accessible ways to improve mental health and emotional wellbeing,



"Film Recipes for Mental Health" Logo © Cinema Center Romuva



Astor Cinema in Athens, Greece © Astor Cinema

particularly in the context of European cinema. Film therapy, combined with expert-led discussions, provides an innovative way to use storytelling and visual media to promote self-reflection, emotional expression, and healing. Moreover, introducing new audiences to European cinema not only fosters a deeper appreciation of its cultural value, but also strengthens connections between viewers and filmmakers.

What are your expectations?

From this project, I expect to see increased awareness and appreciation of European cinema's potential to improve emotional and mental wellbeing. The film therapy sessions should offer participants meaningful personal insights, helping them to process emotions and improve mental health. I also anticipate that the stop-motion animation workshops will engage participants creatively, fostering a deeper connection to

filmmaking. Overall, I expect the project to strengthen audience relationships, create a lasting impact on emotional health, and generate new, innovative ways to use cinema as a therapeutic tool.

What could be its impact be at a local and national level?

The project itself becomes a recipe for cinemas that, through adapting to the changing needs of society, are then able to acquire additional values and functions. At the same time, the European films screened in the cinema therapy sessions take on additional functions: their themes and characters are analysed in greater depth, and a stronger link is created between the audience/participant and the cinema. The project aims to refocus the attention of the entire cinema network on new ways of communicating with film: to promote films through themes that are close to everyone's hearts, which in this instance are emotions. New ways of communicating can help to attract a wider audience, as well as giving films a dual dimension.



Cinema Center Romuva in Kaunas, Lithuania © Justė Vyšniauskaitė

Indrė Mikelaitytė, Deputy Director at Cinema Center Romuva

Name of the Project: **Film Recipes for Mental Health**

Coordinator: **Cinema Center Romuva (Kaunas, Lithuania)**

Partner cinemas: **Astor Cinema (Athens, Greece), Cinema ARTA, (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)**