

What do we mean by decolonizing festival programs?

Basically we try to look at our festival programming methodologies from selection to presentation, from the perspective of the decolonization theory. We would like to include in our perspective every movement that grew in parallel and hand in hand with the theory of decolonisation, from the critical race theory to feminism and intersectionality. Therefore we encourage our fellow program curators to examine their work processes, their principles and the complex nature of their choices and also what position they fill in and what responsibilities they have.

As human rights festival organizers, we all share the same values, but in our practices we differ, also based on where we are located geographically, and who we are personally. We would like to take this opportunity of a two-day workshop to share our experiences, unique perspectives on how we can make a difference and a step towards equality, sisterhood and liberty.

1. Composition of the programming teams

How does professional background and lived experience shape curatorial choices? In a decolonial context, does the composition of program teams also mean questioning whose perspectives and tastes should be taken into account? Does a diverse programme require a diverse curatorial team, or can inclusive programming be achieved regardless of who makes the decisions?

2. Who Gets into the Festival Canon?

The same countries, filmmakers and production companies often reappear across the international festival circuit, while many others remain underrepresented. Although festival selections appear to be independent curatorial decisions, they are shaped by sales agents, broadcasters, funding structures, premiere requirements and market trends. This session explores how these visible and invisible power structures influence programming, how much autonomy curators really have, and how festivals can balance artistic independence with funding expectations, diversity goals and audience demands.

3. Curating Blind Spots

European audiences often engage deeply with stories about discrimination, colonialism or human rights abuses in distant countries while remaining unfamiliar with similar realities much closer to home. Many festival-goers know more about Indigenous communities in North America than about the everyday experiences of Roma communities across Europe. Why do some stories become part of the international conversation while others remain cultural blind spots? This discussion explores how

festivals can help audiences recognise the overlooked histories and inequalities within their own societies.

4. Film Festivals as Architects of Collective Memory

Film festivals do more than present films—they shape the way societies remember the past. Through programming choices, retrospectives and thematic sections, festivals decide which histories are revisited, which perspectives are amplified and which memories remain absent. This session explores how curators can rethink the cinematic canon while creating a more inclusive and pluralistic collective memory.

5. Nothing About Us Without Us

The principle of *Nothing About Us Without Us* has become central to contemporary discussions on representation. Should people with lived experience always be directly involved in the process of filmmaking, or can a film itself authentically represent their perspective? This session explores how festivals can combine artistic representation with meaningful participation, moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward genuine collaboration.

6. Cinematic Value vs. Social Relevance

Can an Important Topic Compensate for a Weaker Film?

As festivals increasingly engage with urgent political and social issues, curators often face the dilemma between artistic excellence and social relevance. Should a powerful subject justify programming a less accomplished film? Or should cinematic quality always remain the primary criterion? This discussion also considers whether dominant aesthetic standards themselves reflect unequal cultural power structures.

This event is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



**Co-funded by
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