



## Media Literacy Through a Social Experiment: Collaborative Filmmaking

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### 1. Introduction

Idea and Plan for "Filmitalgud" – to engage a whole country, in its entirety territorially and populationally, in the making of one, collaborative film.

"Filmitalgud" is an Estonian compound word that is the joint version of two very varied words. The word "film" represents collaboration under the leadership of one person with a strong vision. The Estonian word "talgud" represents working together for a common interest. The underlying goal of this common interest may be helping a friend or relative or the process, itself, i.e. spending quality free time. The "talgud" process is one of the brightest pinnacles of a democratic working model; it doesn't lack leadership, but leaders can never prevail in the process. All ideas are good and every action done in the context provided is useful.

Kinobuss, the organization behind Filmitalgud, has been active in the film/education/cultural sector for ten years by continuously and step-by-step developing methods of film education. And thus, the process in question became an edutainment project spanning the year 2011. During the process, the whole society was activated to collaboratively make a film with a universal plot. On the organizational side, the film was to be a grand present to Estonian film for its 100th anniversary as 2012 is the official centennial of Estonian film.

Films are the most noteworthy products of the media literacy that is integral to today's information society. Above all, films are a collaborative creation.

### Overview: Case study - Filmitalgud

Filmitalgud is probably the first project in the history of world filmmaking where the whole population of one country is voluntarily brought together to collaboratively make a film with a considerable result – all in the name of an educational process.

And just like, in a choir, the beat is set by the conductor's baton, even though the participants are mostly volunteers and amateurs, the Filmitalgud process took place under the supervision of professionals.

### Media Education Output in the Learning Process

We used all kinds of multimodal learning environments and opportunities:

- 1) direct professional-learner interaction, workshops: theory and exercises,
- 2) a reality television show as a visual learning platform,
- 3) a website as a forum-based mode of exchanging information, discussing topics, exhibiting work/examples,
- 4) social media, i.e. <http://www.facebook.com/filmitalgud> as a constant source of information that involves the passive learner,
- 5) the film production process as an exemplary learning environment; direct contact between tutors and participants; learning through doing,
- 6) a lecture each day of filmmaking – various topics covered,
- 7) the film being presented and analyzed by the same people who made it.

The teaching process used the historical master-apprentice teacher-learner model. The master taught by doing, all the while directing the process, being responsible for the results, but also delegating assignments. This is a working relationship that can be implemented in personal handiwork, but not in large-scale, industrial manufacturing.

There were different numbers of tutors at the head of different stages of filmmaking: three professional screenwriters edited the ideas received, a dozen different acting coaches, three art department tutors, seven directing tutors, one camera department tutor, two sound department tutors, and so on.

Except for three actors, all the performers were "people from the crowd". All departments worked with the help of volunteers, who were exchanged daily or cyclically, depending on the job.

The volunteers who wanted to participate in the film crew first signed up online in the Filmitalgud.ee platform. In addition to indicating their desired role, they also uploaded samples of their work. Professionals chose the participants for each crew role based on this database.

The volunteers/collaborative crew members received training in two phases:

- 1) During the preparation, visitation and planning of shooting locations, each directing tutor visited the shooting location together with their volunteer crew members.
- 2) The shooting days in each county were simultaneously also complete, practical filmmaking training days. In addition to the master-apprentice relationship, the days also included lectures on certain topics of filmmaking for a larger circle of enthusiasts.

Along with the aforementioned topics, the themes covered during the shooting/training were: production, special effects, costumes, set design, editing, lighting, sound, storyboarding, distribution, animation, and make-up. As an example, the camera crew had 160 people register. Two camera operators per day were selected for each of the



15 shooting days, with an additional 3 permanent “super volunteers” who were responsible for the camera equipment and helping to coordinate the process. The whole camera department was overseen by one professional tutor, who practically never held the camera, but nonetheless kept his eye on the visual style, made corrections to the volunteers’ creative efforts and intervened at critical moments in order to keep the process going. There was a clear learning chain of command: apprentice>assistant>master.

### **Community Interest and Participation**

In the preparation and development phase of Filmitalgud, c. 5000 people registered through the Internet platform. Using these people’s ideas and help, the film script was written, the shooting locations found (using Google maps-based technology) and all sorts of different props were found. Statistics showed that the television show (where the candidate actors were trained) was followed by about 10% of the population. The actual, physical participants in the filming process numbered around 1,500 people. The Filmitalgud.ee website received a total of around 100,000 unique visitors according to IP address statistics.

The representatives of the Estonian educational sector were very positively inclined towards the whole process. Professional filmmakers and officials had more averse attitudes. As the organizers also saw this as a process of social inclusion, the developers and funders of civil society initiatives were also approached for support. But these decisionmakers saw the process as mere filmmaking and, thus, their support dropped out completely.

### **Distribution, Analysis and Feedback**

Digital Cinema Prints, Blu-ray and DVD versions were made of the film with Estonian, English and Russian subtitles. This means that all modern digital distribution methods were covered.

The film was premiered on 111 screens all over Estonia on the same day, at the same time. As background information, there are currently 34 active cinemas in Estonia. The television premiere had a viewership of 108,000 (with a rating of 8,4).

Consistent cooperation with national media meant that the Filmitalgud process and screenings received diverse coverage in the larger print publications in each county and local radio, as well as in most national publications, radio and television.

### **Innovation**

At least 12 innovative approaches were implemented during the Filmitalgud filmmaking and learning process, bringing about a paradigm shift:

- 1) A new way of thinking: individual to universal and universal to individual. Everyone has an opportunity to be involved; no one is forced to do so.
- 2) A new filmmaking platform that is available and accessible to anyone who wants to participate. The platform gives an overview of the process while also directing in. Such a filmmaking platform has never been known to.
- 3) A new, unprecedented collaborative scriptwriting process. The platform exists, thus all that is necessary for creative work is participants and a few savvy helpers.
- 4) A new method of selecting cast and crew that is the most democratic in the world – professionals and the public work hand-in-hand. The main actors were selected by a reality TV show. For the rest of the cast and the crew, the selection process was a film-themed hobby and job market where enthusiasts and interested actors and film crew members found their roles.
- 5) A new approach to finding props – “you find it and bring it to us”. Through a map application on the online platform, the whole country was used to find shooting locations, decorations, and props.
- 6) A new way of involving communities literally all over Estonia. The resulting script, locations, and props were all local – local legends made it into the story, locally famous things were the props, local activities provided the backdrop for the story. Thus, people in all 15 counties felt that the result was not just made by them, but one that really belonged to them.
- 7) A new use of cross media – making the complete process completely open. With an entirely open process, all outreach for help was open as well. At the same time, all mistakes made are out in the open, those responsible can’t be blamed for them because mistakes are learning opportunities. Being open and public - allowing you to get adequate feedback and avoid unjust judgement.
- 8) A new way of shooting – full-length, feature film was shot only on photo cameras. Modern technological advances have gotten to the point where just about anyone knows how to use the tools that can produce a generally acceptable and professionally presentable cinema product. Commercially accessible technology has blurred the line between amateurs and professionals, which is bringing about a paradigm shift.
- 9) A new, moving editing station. For the first time in Estonian history, a film was edited right at the shooting location and the rough cut was viewed that very night. This enabled all collaborative participants to view the results of the process and see the film’s sequences emerge as they are made, giving the public a frame of reference for visualizing the final product.
- 10) A new method of crowd funding – the first Estonian crowd funding website! This gave the public an opportunity to support the learning process and pay for part of it.
- 11) A new distribution model – the first nation-wide premiere in Estonian history, where locals were also involved in organizing the screenings. Film culture is social in nature, thus all its aspects should be carried out socially.



12) A new approach to the material filmed – the output of the entire process is open source. The film was made together with the people; we want to enable them to use the material as widely as possible. No one is denied the right to use the Filmitalgud footage for personal use or to share it on the Internet. Using the material for commercial purposes without permission is not allowed. Money is the equivalent of energy.

### **Conclusions**

The Filmitalgud project was very complex and diffused throughout its various stages. On the administrative level, this made the whole process very difficult to manage but on the promotional level, it only benefited the project.

The Filmitalgud “folk film” had a very dignified premiere in the 700-seat cinema with an honorary visit from the President of the Republic of Estonia. The admissions for the week of the premiere were in third place as compared to the so-called world commercial cinema blockbusters. The viewership of the television premiere came second only to an extremely popular, local entertainment show.

Now we also know that:

- 1) there are potential filmmakers in every county and municipality who will continue to be active in recording local life,
- 2) there has been a surge in the interest in documentary filmmaking,
- 3) there are 121 places across Estonia where it is possible to screen films using local people and equipment and in the face of efforts to enliven local cinema culture.

The actual importance – or marginality – of the Filmitalgud process will be the question of whether the beauty of the process stands the test of time.

### **Attestation**

Film (as an audiovisual product) is a composite of all the arts. This art form has consistently developed hand-in-hand with humanity’s technological advances and development. The film made with the Filmitalgud process was naturally, in its essence, a story central to Estonia. But the process, itself, was, above all, a learning activity. It gave different people new opportunities, brought attention to local communities, and told stories about the local culture. Filmitalgud gave people the opportunity to bring new knowledge to small places and gather the thoughts and worldviews found there and to present them to a larger public.

The knowledge and competencies gained throughout the process will remain with the active participants even after the Filmitalgud project is over. People continue to have the opportunity, both on a national and a local level to continuously increase the distribution of knowledge in the field of film and to expand the methods available for creative self-expression.