



## FESTIVAL INFO No. 7 (23.09.2014)

### **Cultural Committee Postpones Cutbacks in State Financing FilmInitiativ Hopes for Continuing Support for the African Film Festival**

In its session on 18 September 2014, the artistic and cultural committee of the Cologne city council did not approve, but rather decided to postpone its decision on the structural funds for the African Film Festival submitted by the city's cultural services department. As such, hope remains that the threatened cutback in structural funds and its definitive expiration three years from now will indeed not be decided.

On the festival's opening day, the cultural services department, in the form of its appointed film advisory board, recommended that the committee lower its previous funding amounts for the African Film Festival by 5,000 euros annually for the 2015-2017 grant cycle. This occurred even though the cultural services expressed the following about FilmInitiativ's work in its submission: "The film advisory board praised the biennial "Out of Europe" African Film Festival for its international networking and for addressing specific communities well. Its quality presentation of African films in Cologne through FilmInitiativ Köln e.V. makes it stand out both in the region and across Germany. The film advisory board further highlighted the festival's consistently international orientation (through trilingual programme materials), its referring to current socio-political upheaval in Africa, and its constant and committed dedication to promoting African filmmaking, which is still far too little praised internationally." However, alongside this praise, the draft also contained a cryptic sentence, which apparently serves as rationale for the structural funding cutbacks targeted by the cultural service: "The film advisory board critically appraised the density of events in non-festival years and a too-minimal change in personnel structure toward sustainability." In a letter to the cultural committee, FilmInitiativ indicated that in previous years this criticism had never been levelled, and plainly stated that it appears financing is being reduced because too many African film events are being offered. In addition, it speaks to its sustainability that after 22 years, the festival founders are still involved and working for the festival, and the staff members on FilmInitiativ's payroll are all around 30 years old. It appears that on the basis of FilmInitiativ's comment, the cultural committee announced the dossier as "in need of consultation" and postponed the decision on its financing amounts.

The committee also postponed making a decision on the cultural services' suggested changes to the outline for film culture financing, whereby the three-year structural funds will run out after a one-time extension at the latest. Should this be the case, the existence of the African Film Festival will be in danger after its 14<sup>th</sup> edition in 2016. FilmInitiativ (and KINOaktiv, the grouping of independent film initiatives) had suggested as an alternative to allow a "renewable application" for the structural funds. Several parliamentary groups within the council suggested to FilmInitiativ that they also found it sensible to allow the possibility of multiple-time granting of structural funds. The parliamentary group Bündnis90/Die Grünen (Greens) submitted a corresponding petition for amendment and FilmInitiativ hopes that this will also be supported by the other groups.

The decisions on both amounts and renewability of structural funds are scheduled to take place at the next committee meeting on 28 October. FilmInitiativ hopes that the success of this year's African Film Festival (with well-attended events and many sold-out showings) convinces the cultural committee to vote for preserving the previously granted funds and thereby voting for the future of the festival.