

Blend: Film & Games 2025 Conference Successfully Held in a Vibrant Atmosphere

Zagreb, October 4, 2025 – Yesterday, at Algebra Bernays University in Zagreb, the **Blend: Film & Games** conference was held for the first time as a two-day event dedicated to the intersection of film and gaming. Experts and representatives from both sectors of the audiovisual industry, from Croatia and around the world, discussed trends, innovations, and challenges shaping future projects.

Over the two days, the conference featured more than 20 panels and lectures with renowned speakers from Croatia, Belgium, Canada, Italy, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Sweden, Austria, and the United Kingdom. Special attention was drawn by keynote talks from **Thierry Van Gyseghem**, animation director of the hit video game *Baldur's Gate 3*, which sold over 15 million copies; **Martins Upitis**, lead animator of the Oscar-winning film *Flow*; and **Fernando Machado**, marketing visionary and former CMO of Activision Blizzard and Burger King.

The conference opened with welcome remarks from the organizers, the academic partner Algebra Bernays University, and other partners. **Benjamin Noah Maričak**, Head of the Games Croatia Office at HAVC and conference co-organizer, stated:

"Blend is not just an opportunity to exchange experiences, ideas, and network — it's also an invitation to think about the future of the film and video game industries."

Mia Pećina Drašković, Head of the Zagreb Film Office and co-organizer, emphasized:

"This year's conference program is the most comprehensive so far, and we're very proud of the large number of international professionals taking part in Blend, as it opens doors for our experts to connect and collaborate on future projects."

Dr. Damir Jugo, President of the Management Board of Algebra Bernays University, welcomed participants, highlighting the conference's interdisciplinarity as crucial for the future of education:

"Students at Algebra Bernays University must work on real projects and engage with industry during their studies. This is how they develop competencies that make them competitive. Our mission is not only to educate but to inspire research, creativity, and courage in creating new high-value products."

H.E. William De Baets, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium, expressed his delight that Belgium was the conference's partner country, noting that many speakers this year came from Belgium. **Christopher P. Marcich**, Director of HAVC, praised the Zagreb Film Office and Games Croatia for exceeding last year's edition, emphasizing that collaboration between these two sectors represents the future of the AV industry. **Krešimir Partl**, State Secretary at the Ministry of Culture and Media,

underlined the importance of continued investment in the dynamic audiovisual sector and recent legal changes introducing new incentives for independent Croatian productions. He also added that the Ministry is actively advocating at the European level for a funding system where game distribution platforms reinvest part of their profits into culturally relevant audiovisual production.

Day One: Film, Production, and Transmedia

The first day began with a discussion on the legal position of producers and their evolving role in creating audiovisual works, featuring **Danilo Šerbedžija**, director and president of DHFA; **Hrvoje Osvadić**, producer and president of HRUP; **Miljenka Čogelja**, producer; and **Christopher P. Marcich**, Director of HAVC, moderated by **Mia Pećina Drašković**. Panelists agreed that the producer's role has changed over the years — many now also act as authors — and that a working group should be established soon to harmonize legislation.

A panel on **Croatian–Belgian co-productions** followed, with **Xavier Rombaut**, Belgian producer; **Christopher P. Marcich**; **Youri Loedts** from Belgium's VAF fund; and **Prof. Dries Deryckere** from Howest University, supported by **Ambassador William De Baets**.

A highly attended panel explored **filming in Croatia**, with insights from world-renowned location managers **John Rakich** (Canada, *Shadowhunters*, *Twisted Metal*), **Enrico Latella** (Italy, *Mission: Impossible 7*, *Tenet*), and **Sabine Schulmeyer** (Germany, *The Matrix Resurrections*, *Constellation*).

The **transmedia panel** featuring **Albert Gajšak (CircuitMess)**, **Damir Šlogar (game developer and collector)**, and **Ivan Kosovec (Magic Omens)** highlighted how film and gaming complement each other, creating new global business opportunities where origin is less important — opening doors for Croatian creators.

An emotional moment came during the panel about Croatia's **Oscar and Goya entry — the documentary *Fiume o Morte!***, with producers **Vanja Jambrović** and **Tibor Kesser**, and **Slobodanka Mišković** from Art Kino Rijeka and the Kvarner Film Commission. The film became the most-watched Croatian documentary in the past 30 years, with over **36,000 viewers**, achieved exclusively through independent cinemas!

The day concluded with two outstanding keynote sessions:

- **Thierry Van Gyseghem**, lead animator of *Baldur's Gate 3* and *Divinity: Original Sin 2*, discussed the intersection of cinematic language and interactive media.
- **Martins Upitis**, Oscar-winning animator of *Flow*, shared creative and technical insights into the film's production, followed by a screening of the award-winning work.

Day Two: Artificial Intelligence, the Future of the Industry, and Sustainability

The second day looked to the future, focusing on **AI and its impact on creative industries**. **Predrag Šuka, doc.art.**, from Algebra Bernays University, opened with a fascinating presentation on how AI can shape the video creation process from script to final product.

The **AI panel** featured **Damir Firšt** (tech strategist and AI consultant), **Vlaho Hrdalo** (lawyer and partner at Hrdalo & Krnić), **Anđelo Jurkas** (director), and **Ivan Murat** (Director of Nanobit), moderated by **Predrag Šuka**.

Keynotes again drew great interest:

- **Jorg Tittel** (UK), director and producer of *The Last Worker*, spoke about the future of games and film beyond content itself.
- **Fernando Machado**, marketing visionary and former CMO of Burger King and Activision Blizzard, and a two-time Adweek Grand Brand Genius award winner, delivered an inspiring talk on the role of creativity in shaping global games and brands.

The **virtual production panel** gathered **Hrvoje Kordić** (Digital Kinetics), **Xavier Rombaut** (Belgium), **Basia Karpinski** (Virtual Production Specialist, TVN XR Studio / Warner Bros. Discovery, Poland), **Matko Burić** (Antitalent), and **Josip Čajić** (stYpe). Another session on **animation without Hollywood budgets** featured **Martins Uptis**, **Dino Krpan**, and **Draško Ivezić**.

The **transmedia talk** about video games based on films and series (*Moomins*, *Paws of Fury*) included **Dimitrije Đokić** (Raw Fury), **Pontus Rundqvist** (Senior Brand Manager, Sweden), and **Hrvoje Mitić** (producer and game scout), moderated by **Dunja Trojan**, Director of Broadcast.hr.

A parallel track focused on **young AV authors and music for video games**. The panel *And They're Not Even 30 Yet!* presented emerging professionals — directors **Karlo Vorih** and **Vida Žagar**; cinematographers **Filip Šarić** and **Reina Krumm**; producers **Karlo Gagulić**, **Laura Pribanić**, and **Patrik Burnić**; and game developers **Tea Stepanić** and **Dominik Cvetkovski**.

The **video game music panel** united three generations of composers: **Nikola Nikita Jeremić** (Serbia, *Aliens: Dark Descent*, *Warhammer 40k*, *Destiny 2*, *Cyberpunk 2077*), **Matija Malatestinić**, and **Damjan Mravunac** (Croteam, *Serious Sam*, *Talos Principle*).

A valuable addition was the **green production panel**, where **Floris Anu Kaaripuro**, Managing Director of Vienna's new HQ7 Studio, presented the positive effects of Austria's new 5% sustainability incentive, moderated by producer **Morana Ikić Komljenović**.

The final panel celebrated the success of the Croatian teen series **SRAM**. Producer **Bruno Mustić** shared insights into the innovative strategies that turned the series into the most-watched Croatian teen show and a global digital phenomenon.

Workshops led by international and local experts — **Thierry Van Gyseghem**, **Andrija Zorić**, **Ivan Šivak**, and **Fernando Machado** — provided hands-on experience in animation, game development, and creative marketing.

Alongside the professional program, attendees enjoyed **student film screenings**, **an exhibition of Croatian gaming studios**, **a voice dubbing activation**, and the popular **Red Bull Tetris Zone**.

The first two-day edition of **Blend: Film & Games** proved that **Zagreb and Croatia** have strong potential as a regional hub for the film and gaming industries. The conference successfully bridged creativity, technology, and business opportunities, fostering dialogue between local and global experts and laying a solid foundation for future editions.

The conference welcomed **over 600 participants**, including numerous high school students and teachers. All lectures will soon be available at www.blendzagreb.eu.

Media Contact:

Tea Akrap – tea@filmzagreb.hr

+385 91 4557 073