



Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Close-up:

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Renaissance of the South Caucasian Cinema

Georgian film director Rusudan Pirveli has had the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for much of her career. Selected for the Open Doors competition of the Locarno International Film Festival she presented her *Sleeping Lessons* project. Interview.



Festival del Film Locarno this year takes place from 7 to 17 August. © Keystone

Rusudan Pirveli is a perfect example of the new Georgian cinema. Her films have been shown at many of the most important festivals. At the age of 38 this director is hyperactive in her field, having just created a production company in Tbilisi with the ambition of making Caucasian cinema known throughout the world.

One of her projects, *Sleeping Lessons*, was presented at the Festival del film Locarno's Open Doors co-production lab, which is supported by the SDC and each year focuses on a region where independent cinema remains fragile. The focus in 2013 has been on films from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

What has it meant to you to be chosen for the Open Doors section?



Rusudan Pirveli. © DR

I am very glad to have been invited to Locarno. I would never have been able to afford to come myself because our means are very limited. Every penny I manage to save I invest in the production of my films!

Open Doors also allows me to meet with other filmmakers from the region, which is a must and would otherwise be very difficult for us to organise.

My aim is to draw attention to the *Sleeping Lessons* project, which is being shown outside Georgia for the first time, so as to give the best possible chance to the film I hope to make one day. I am also taking advantage of this opportunity to promote the project which will follow, but which at present exists only as a synopsis.

Locarno is an ideal place to promote our productions outside the region. In the past few days I have had no less than 29 meetings with potential partners. This has enabled me to have contacts and exchanges that are very useful for my work and hopefully will one day produce concrete results. In any case the Festival has already enabled us to open our own door to the world, so it is truly useful in many ways.

Is Georgian TV able to co-produce films?

No, unfortunately that is not possible. It can only become involved after the screening of our productions, and then only with very, one might even say ridiculously modest means. We have no choice but to look for financing outside the region in order to implement our projects, a situation not uncommon elsewhere in the world. I can speak for my fellow filmmakers in the South Caucasus, for we are all in the same boat.

More than a decade ago you participated in the AVANTI programme to promote the cinema, supported by the SDC and implemented by FOCAL in the South Caucasus. What did you gain from this experience?

The programme played a decisive role for me and my career. It is here that I learned the tricks of the trade, thanks in particular to the professional training provided. I was enrolled in the short films section. We had some exceptional teachers, including the dramatist and scriptwriter Antoine Jaccoud and the filmmaker Ursula Meier, both of whom came to Tbilisi for the courses. The programme also helped to draw the attention of European producers to our work.

AVANTI enabled us to understand a system from which we were excluded and about which we knew virtually nothing. For example we had to learn the language suitable for approaching professionals in the cinema world. We also had the good fortune to work with the Swiss distributor Christa Saredi, who freely shared her knowledge with us.

Many of us have been able to benefit from these courses, as can be seen from the number of participants in the AVANTI programme featured in Open Doors. For example my compatriots Rusudan Glurjidze, George Ovashvili and Alexander Kvatashidze, as well as Nika Shek from Armenia and Asif Rustamov from Azerbaijan. In so far as Georgia is concerned AVANTI made it possible to relaunch film production and has helped rebuild this sector.

What role do culture and cinema play in your region?

The conflicts in the region resulted in the severing of all existing ties between our countries and the isolation of each. In my view culture in general and the cinema in particular are effective ways to re-establish these ties and rebuild the bridges that should never have been destroyed. Much of course remains to be done, but at least it's a beginning. Knowing each other personally is a great aid to communication. Dialogue is the only road to peace building and moving ahead.

After AVANTI I became convinced that we need to launch joint projects in our region, not only for economic reasons but above all to restore some stability and confidence, and move forward. In addition to my directorial activities I have created a production company which I have named "Causasian Filmodrom". The name has been chosen deliberately to show that our ambition extends beyond Georgian cinema. We want to encourage and implement coproductions because I am convinced that only cooperation will enable our small countries to rebound and catch a glimpse of a future together that is more serene. It is the only way to ensure that things improve, not only in the cultural field but in all areas.

- **AVANTI.** The SDC created a programme in support of the South Caucasus between 2002 and 2011 in partnership with FOCAL, the Foundation for professional training in cinema and audiovisual media. The aim of AVANTI is to revitalise film culture in the Caucasus, notably by providing support for the shooting of films in the region.

AWARD. Rusudan Pirveli has won the CNC ("Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée") award 2013 in Locarno with *Sleeping Lessons* (7000 EUR).

OPEN DOORS

The [Open Doors section of the Festival del Film Locarno](#) is a coproduction lab supported mainly by the SDC.

The 11th edition, which took place from 10th to 13th August 2013, focused on the cinema of the South Caucasus, a border region between Asia and Europe.

Twelve directors and producers from the region presented their films in an effort to seek financing and ensure their production. Each year there are three prizes, for the best projects.

Additional Information and Documents

 [Kulturförderung im Kaukasus](#)

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