

Rethinking geolinguistic spaces: The San Sebastian Film Festival between Latin America and Europe

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The San Sebastian Film Festival, also known as the Zinemaldia ('the film festival' in the Basque language), celebrated its 64th edition from 16–24 September 2016. The festival location in the Basque Country near the Spanish border with France has influenced its development since its inception in 1953. Modelled after the pioneering festivals Venice and Cannes, in a spa town frequented by the Spanish royal family and bourgeoisie, the festival appeared during the Francoist dictatorship and soon achieved international recognition, eventually obtaining the FIAPF accreditation as an A-category festival in 1957. Since its origins as an initiative of local businessmen, then sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the festival organisation and funding depended on governmental support. In 1991 the festival became a public company owned and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Culture, the Basque Government, the government of the province of Gipuzkoa, and the city council of San Sebastian.[1]

Throughout its history the Zinemaldia has searched for a distinctive identity with uneven results. The role of the Zinemaldia as a benchmark for Latin American cinema in Europe is its most consolidated and internationally-recognised identity. Built on its tradition of exhibiting Latin American productions and attracting professionals from the Spanish-speaking world this role is certainly facilitated by a shared language. On the other hand it is worth noting that since the 1980s the Basque country has witnessed an increasing awareness, protection, recovery, and promotion of the Basque language. It is in this context that the political concern about European non-hegemonic and

minoritised languages has reached festival policies with the new Glocal Cinema initiative. This article will focus on the global and local dynamics that affect the positioning of the Zinemaldia, bringing into attention festival practices influenced by geolinguistic spaces, international positioning, and industrial concerns as reflected in the program of its 2016 edition.[2] We will focus on the festival's role as a catalyst for Latin American cinema and also on new strategies to position itself as a referent for small cinemas in Europe (including local Basque productions).



Fig. 1: The Kursaal, the main venue of San Sebastian Film Festival (image by Aida Vallejo), and the Awards ceremony of the 64th edition of the festival (image by Gorka Estrada/courtesy of San Sebastian Film Festival).

Boosting Latin American cinema

One of the main features of the Zinemaldia is its focus on Latin American cinema, which differentiates it from other major European festivals. This identity is rooted in the festival's origins in 1953, characterised by the colonial nostalgia of the Francoist dictatorship, and is certainly facilitated by a shared Spanish language. Today this strategic positioning is articulated both through industrial activities that attract international funding for Latin American productions and a notable presence of films from this region in the program presented in different sections, included a dedicated one. Two of the most relevant activities organised by the industry department of the festival (the 'Industry Club') are aimed at boosting Hispanic cinema production. 'Cine en Construcción' (also known as 'Films in Progress') is a showcase of films in post-production in need of funding for their completion and/or distribution; the Europe-Latin America co-production forum is a pitching session for film projects at an early stage of production and in search of co-producers.

Cine en Construcción, created in 2002, is a collaboration between San Sebastian Film Festival and the Cinélatino Rencontres de Toulouse Festival, and it takes place at both events. During Cine en Construcción, which celebrated its 30th edition in September 2016 in San Sebastian, six Latin American film projects in post-production were screened, selected from 113 submitted films coming from 20 different countries. The two main awards of this section (the Cine en Construcción 30 Industry Award and the CACI/Ibermedia TV Films in Progress Award) went to *La educación del rey* by Santiago Esteves, covering the expenses of theatrical and television distribution respectively.[3]

The V Europe-Latin America Co-Production Forum took place at the San Telmo Museum, which became a networking space for industry professionals coming from Europe, Latin America, Spain, and Canada (which was the invited country for the new 'Focus on' industry activity). Among the 194 submitted projects 17 were selected in this 5th edition, 10 of which were directed by female filmmakers. Argentina (which has one of the strongest film industries in the region) was the country best represented and received three of the forum awards, including the best project award for *7:35 AM* (directed by Javier Van de Couter and produced by Varsovia Films),[4] a special mention and the newly established ARTE International Prize[5] for *Hogar* (an Italian-Argentinian co-production directed by Maura Delpero and produced by Disparte), and the EFADs-CACI Europe Latin America Co-Production Grant which went to *Los días según ellos* (an Argentinian-Spanish-French co-production directed by Juan Pablo Félix and produced by Utópica Cine). Most of the projects presented looked at contemporary social problems or revisited a troubled political past in times of dictatorships.

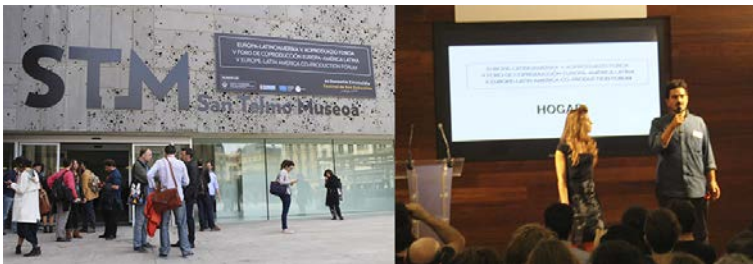


Fig. 2: Industry delegates take a break at the entrance of San Telmo Museum, the main venue of the V Europe-Latin American Forum and the networking activities of Cine en Construcción (left); and the pitching presentation of 'Hogar' at the co-production forum (right). Images by Aida Vallejo.

There has been rising scholarly interest to address the issue of festival influence in the production and global circulation of cinemas from peripheral regions, many of which focus on Latin American cinemas.[6] More specifically, Cine en Construcción has been analysed by authors who scrutinise the influence of international (sometimes neo-colonial) dynamics in the shaping of contemporary Latin American cinema as well as the feedback effect that the festival circuit has created providing funding for films that will eventually fill their programs.[7]

A close look at the presence of Latin American cinema in the 2016 edition of the Zinemaldia confirms the tendency to select films that have been supported by the festival in development stages, with a close relationship among Cine en Construcción, the co-production forum, and the Latin American films included in its program. This is the case with *El Invierno* (2016) by the Argentinian filmmaker Emiliano Torres, which participated in the official competition of this 64th edition of San Sebastian, receiving the Special Jury Award and the Best Photography Award (for Ramiro Civita). The film was presented in the previous session of Cine en Construcción that took place at the Festival de Toulouse in March 2016, receiving financial support for its completion as well as the necessary professional contacts that facilitate its further distribution.

Another indication are the Europe-Latin America co-production forum participants, which also nurture the wider international festival circuit. Many of the projects presented in previous editions of the co-production forum have been selected by major international film festivals in 2016.[8] These include: *El soñador* (2016) (previous working title: *Donde sueñan los salvajes*) by Adrián Saba, which premiered at the Generation section in the Berlinale; *Las Elegidas* (2015) by David Pablos, included in Un Certain Régard in Cannes in 2015 (receiving five Ariel awards, including best film and best direction); and *La idea de un lago* (2016) (previous working title: *Pozo de Aire*) by Milagros Mumenthaler, also *El Auge del Humano* (2016), by Eduardo Williams, presented in Locarno's official competition and Cineasti del Presente sections respectively. Finally, *Jesus* (2016) (previous working title: *Niño Nadie*) by Fernando Guzzoni, which was presented in the II Co-Production Forum, has been included in the official competition at this 64th edition of the Zinemaldia.



Fig. 3: Images of the films *El Invierno* (Emiliano Torres) (left) and *Rara* (Pepa San Martín) (right).

The Zinemaldia maintains its reputation as a site for discovery and promotion of Latin American cinema mostly through film selection. In addition to the presence of several Latin American films throughout its diverse sections the festival offers the special section Horizontes Latinos which presented a selection of 13 films in 2016. This section includes Spanish premières of films ‘produced totally or partially in Latin America and directed by filmmakers of Latin origin or set in or on the subject of Latin communities across the world’.[9] Again, some films competing in this section are linked to previous editions of Cine en Construcción and are experiencing a successful festival career. Among them are the winner of this year’s Horizontes Award, *Rara* (2016) (Pepa San Martín’s first feature),[10] which participated in Cine en Construcción 29 in Toulouse.[11]

New strategies of international positioning: The Glocal Cinema initiative

In addition to the focus on Latin American cinema the festival is actively working on extending its interests to new regions and geolinguistic realms, aiming to become a benchmark for European small cinemas. This strategy appears as a confluence of both local and global political dynamics developed from the 1990s. The local refers to the active governmental policies to recover, protect, and promote the use of the Basque language; while the global refers to the incorporation of Spain (and therefore the Basque Country) into the European Union, where regional powers are gaining visibility. In this frame the Basque Government Department of Education, Language Policy and Culture started the Glocal Cinema project, acting as leader for those European states and regions that produce films featuring non-hegemonic lan-

guages.[12] In 2015 representatives from film funds and promotion and cultural institutes belonging to 15 European regions and countries, including the Basque Country, met at the San Sebastian International Film Festival and signed the Glocal Cinema: Big Stories, Small Countries manifesto, which has the main goal to bolster cinema in European non-hegemonic languages. As stated in the third point of the manifesto (III. Origin of the Project):

In response to existing concepts of ‘small and middle languages’, the initiators of the Other European Filmographies: cinema in non-hegemonic languages project agreed on a definition that includes all the languages spoken in Europe except the ‘five big’ ones (English, French, German, Spanish and Italian). [13]

The Glocal Cinema manifesto[14] advocates for a cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and defends its economic support through public institutions. Signing representatives agreed to meet periodically at European Film Festivals. After the first meeting in San Sebastian in 2015 the group came together at the Berlinale. In September 2016 they met again in San Sebastian. Further meetings include Berlin (to organise the schedule for the following year) and the European Film Forum taking place in Brussels in December 2016.

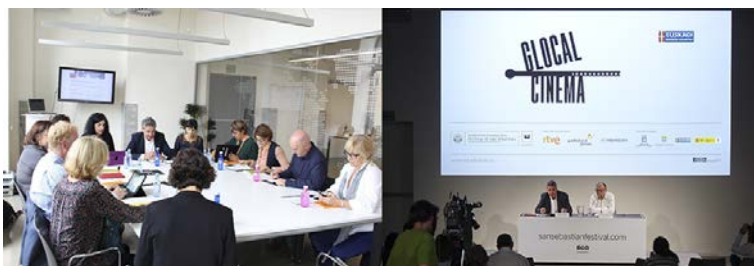


Fig. 4: Meeting of the Glocal Cinema network in Tabakalera Cultural Centre (left) and press conference by Joxean Muñoz (Vice-Counselor of Culture of the Government of the Basque Country) and Jose Luis Rebordinos (Director of the San Sebastian Film Festival) (right). Images courtesy of San Sebastian Film Festival.

In addition to the meetings the workgroup has started to organise new industrial activities during the Zinemaldia including professional talks and networking activities (like this edition’s Focus on Nordic Glocal, organised within the V Europe-Latin America co-production forum, including representatives from Denmark, Iceland, and Norway), also a new industry event announced for 2017 called Glocal in Progress. Modelled after Cine en Construcción, Glocal in Progress will consist of the exhibition of European films

in post-production shot in non-hegemonic languages and in search of funding for completion and distribution. As declared by the Glocal Cinema project coordinator Jara Ayucar there are no agreements in place regarding the inclusion of a certain amount of films from these regions in the competitive or other sections or the creation of a special section (like Horizontes Latinos).[15]

Finally, cinema in the Basque language, as representative of one of the small cinemas included in the Glocal Cinema project, also has its (modest) place in the festival program. These films are mainly showcased in the Zinemira section devoted to Basque cinema (which includes local productions shot either in Spanish or Basque). Aimed at supporting local film productions this section appeared in 2009 as a continuation of the Basque Cinema Day celebrated between 1997 and 2008. Furthermore the festival grants the Irizar Award for Basque Cinema to films with at least 20% of local production (not necessarily shot in the Basque language) included in any of the festival sections. This year the award went to *Pedaló* (2016), a feature-length documentary directed by Juan Palacios.



Fig. 5: Basque Film Gala celebrated at the Victoria Eugenia Theatre (left); and the film *Pedaló* by Juan Palacios. Image: Gari Garaialde/courtesy of San Sebastian Film Festival.

It is worth noting that, in retrospect, very few films shot in the Basque language have made it to other major sections of the festival, including the official competition. One of the few exemptions is the participation of *Loreak* (2014), directed by Jon Garaño and Jose Mari Goenaga, in the 2014 edition of the Zinemaldia. This was a landmark in the history of Basque cinema as this was the first film shot in the Basque language to compete for the Golden Shell (and also the first shot in Basque to be chosen by the Spanish Film Academy as its submission for the Oscar for best foreign-language film). A year later another film in Basque, *Amama*(2015) by Asier Altuna, was included in the official competition. The low production capacity of the Basque

Country is nevertheless a drawback to get high-quality films to compete in equal terms with international productions, which was apparent by the number of low-budget productions and documentary films in the Zinemira section.

Conclusion

Looking at the 64th edition of the Zinemaldia it is clear that the festival strategy consists of covering as many fronts as possible, with the new Glocal Cinema project adding a new strand to its all-encompassing program. While its relevance for Latin American cinema has been consolidated through the years the new strategy to focus on European non-hegemonic languages is just taking its first steps. Both culturally and institutionally the Basque Country seems an appropriate place from which to lead the Glocal Cinema network's initiatives. Plurilingualism, as a distinctive feature and major concern for Basque society and institutions, is a very interesting and rich cultural aspect of cinema and can therefore serve to increase San Sebastian's potential to attract professionals. Time will show if this strategy remains in the realm of parallel industrial activities or if (as we saw in the case of Cine en Construcción) the Glocal Cinema initiative will start to get embedded in programming strategies, incorporating films produced under its auspices to the festival selection. If so the main challenge will be how to best reconcile the diverse sections and interests of the festival while articulating a differentiated identity that builds on global and regional dynamics that position it as a bridge between Latin America and Europe.

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Websites

Glocal Cinema: <http://www.glocalcinema.com/>

San Sebastian Film Festival's official website: <https://www.sansebastianfestival.com>

Notes

- [1] Each owning 25% of the company's shares. As noted by the festival director Jose Luis Rebordinos, approximately the 52% of the budget (of a total of about 7.5 million Euros) is covered by public institutions and the rest by private sponsors and ticket sales (the latter, as he notes, reaches about 600.000 Euros). <http://www.elmundo.es/pais-vasco/2015/06/17/558194e9ca4741c5268b4591.html>.
- [2] In which the city of San Sebastian holds the title of European Capital of Culture.
- [3] The former grants Spanish distribution of the film and covering the expenses of the DCP (Digital Cinema Package) copy with English subtitles; the latter covers the expenses of television broadcasting in Ibermedia TV and Ibermedia Digital. http://www.sansebastianfestival.com/2016/sections_and_films/films_in_progress/8/in.
- [4] A 10.000 Euro award for the major producer of the project.
- [5] This award was created in this 64th edition of San Sebastian Film Festival and consists of 5.000 Euros for the major producer of the project.
- [6] Wong 2011; Ross 2010, 2011; Rodríguez Isaza 2014; Campos 2015.

- [7] Falicov 2010, 2013; Campos 2012, 2013; Triana-Toribio 2013.
- [8] The collaboration between San Sebastian and Cannes' Marché du Film and the Argentinian I.N.C.A.A. (Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales) gives some of the projects presented in the co-production forum the opportunity to continue their international career in the Ventana Sur market based in Buenos Aires and in the next edition of the Producers Network in Cannes. This opportunity is key for their further international prospects.
- [9] https://www.sansebastianfestival.com/2016/sections_and_films/horizontes_latinos/8/in
- [10] With 35.000 Euros of which 10.000 are for the director and the rest for the Spanish distributor of the film.
- [11] Other films included in Horizontes Latinos that participated in Cine en Construcción are: *Aquí no ha pasado nada* (2016), a feature by Alejandro Fernández Almendras, which premièred in Sundance and won the FIPRESCI award at the Festival Cartagena de Indias (Colombia), which participated in Cine en Construcción 2015; *Era o Hotel Cambridge* (*Hotel Cambridge*, 2016) directed by Eliane Caffé, which received the Industry Award of Cine en Construcción last year in San Sebastián; and *El Amparo* (Rober Calzadilla, 2016), which participated in Cine en Construcción in 2015 (previous working title: *Sobrevivientes*).
- [12] Although the Basque Country can benefit from EU funding to implement cultural policies that contribute to the building of a European audiovisual space, and the local EU MEDIA program office for the Basque region is located in the city of San Sebastian, the Glocal Cinema initiative is mainly funded by the local government.
- [13] Although some members of the Glocal Cinema initiative come from regions where the Russian language can be considered hegemonic (such as the Baltic states) this language has not been considered by the initiative, which is mostly inspired by the European Union's Treaty of Lisbon and therefore focuses on its Member States, excluding Russia (see <http://www.glocal-cinema.com/pages/manifesto>).
- [14] The document includes four main points aimed at strengthening film industries working in small/medium languages: (1) Create an informal working group; (2) Support encounters and co-operation between filmmakers; (3) To raise awareness on the linguistic diversity of European cinema; (4) To increase visibility of the represented cinemas. <http://www.glocal-cinema.com/pages/manifesto>.
- [15] Email interview with Jara Ayucar, program coordinator of Glocal Cinema (5 October 2016).
- [16] This review is part of the ikerFESTS research project (EHUA16/31) funded by the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) and the @CIN-EMA research project I+D+i (CSO2014-52750-P) 'Transnational relations in Hispanic digital cinemas: the axes of Spain, Mexico, and Argentina' funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, Spanish Government. https://www.ehu.eus/ehusfera/ikerfests/_english/ and http://uc3m.lib-guides.com/CIN_EMA.