

## A brief study of film festivals in Mexico: Consumption and historical evolution 2010-2016

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Mexico has experienced several cycles of growth or decline in film production and consumption, and like many other countries its own cinematography has been left out of the North American corpus that dominates the exhibition circuits. The mastery of American cinematography, which largely responds to canons originating with the Hollywood industry, imposes guidelines for aesthetic treatment, content, production, distribution, exhibition, and consumption that dominates the film market in the country.

As a response to this context and in order to create new spaces that allow for the exhibition of national cinematographic productions, mostly of smaller budget and scope, a series of film festivals have been created that open new possibilities for exhibition. Such festivals promote a unique aesthetic treatment of cinematography, production, content, distribution, exhibition, and consumption that is much more diverse, specialized, and plural for creators, producers, and audiences, both national and foreign.

There has been a significant growth in the number of film festivals in the country. In 2000, 10 festivals were programmed; in 2013 that number increased to 77; and in 2016, 113 festivals were held (IMCINE, 2014). 2018 will see the inauguration of a new festival, the Festival Internacional de la Ciudad de México (FICM, International Festival of Mexico City), which is a direct descendent of the extinct Festival Internacional de Cine Contemporáneo (FICCO).

The most recognised festivals and exhibitions take place in the most important cities, such as Guadalajara, Morelia, Guanajuato, Los Cabos, and Playa del Carmen. However, a number of important festivals are concentrated in Mexico City (19 events), which contrasts with entities where only one or two,

or none at all, are held. For these last, a state program called Cine en Tu Comunidad was created (IMCINE 2014, 2016).

In order to understand the evolution of a cultural expression that is already part of the scenario of the country's film industry and culture, this study analyses the festivals and cinematographic exhibitions that have been held in Mexico between 2010 and 2016. The analysis covers: festival themes; geographical distribution, frequency of editions; attendance and profit.

A brief summary of the top ten film festivals in the country is also presented by number of attendees. What results is a revealing scenario of a cultural industry that involves spaces, programmers, critics, distributors, audiences, creators (directors, actors, designers, sound artists, etc.), journalists, traditional and digital media, business models and the market.

We perform a theoretical framework and a state of detailed art focused on contemporary research concerning film festivals in the international context and in Mexico. Authors like De Valck and Loist (2010, 2016), Iordanova (2006-2016) and Vallejo (2014) are pillars in the specialised research on festivals in the world, among other authors that are reviewed.

In the national context there seems to be a dearth of specialised studies, with a few exceptions carried out by Gamez (2012) on the Chicano film festival; Howard (2012) on cinema in the southeast and Mexico; Smith (2010) on the Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia (FICM, Morelia International Film Festival); Suarez-Hesketh (2013) on cultural narratives in the context of FICM; and texts in *Variety*, which are more angled toward film criticism than to the research of O'Boyle (2008) and Fuente (2009).

## Methodology

The methodological construction of the present research is founded upon three fundamental instruments: a qualitative bibliographical research on festivals throughout the world, Latin America, and Mexico; an inquiry into the concept of festivals in specialised studies; and the analysis of two databases with information on income, attendance, geographic distribution, thematic, and years of festivals in Mexico.

The analysis of the databases aims to identify trends in the above categories: income, attendance, geographic distribution, theme, month and year of exhibition of festivals and cinematographic exhibitions in Mexico from 2010 to 2016.

One of the databases has the company Rentrak (2017) as a source, which belongs to ComScore (<http://bit.ly/2lwMwzm>) and incorporates consumption data from 2010 to 2016. From this we were able to retrieve information on income in Mexican pesos, attendance (number of people), festival titles, and the year of its realisation.

The second database includes information from IMCINE (2016), which reports some characteristics of the festivals held in Mexico, including place of performance or state and title of the festivals and year, from 2010 to 2016. To this database we add the information from the Rentrak database (2017) to consolidate it, analyse its coincidences, and complement them by the differences of information that they contain.

There are no reports published by IMCINE from the year 2000 to 2009. Therefore, it has been decided that the unification of the databases of IMCINE and Rentrak be from 2010 to 2016. The result is a unified database that allows for a clearer and more complete scenario on the evolution of festivals in Mexico from 2010 to 2016.

The quantitative analysis allows us to derive some qualitative tendencies as to the historical evolution on the quantity and type of festivals that are organised in Mexico during the analysed period. The findings are representative of what happened during the present century.

## Analysis of results

The results that we analyse are then organised into two large blocks: a) analysis of consumption, by income and attendance; and b) analysis of the evolution in time by month and year, thematic, and geographical distribution by the state.

### 1. a) Analysis of consumption: Income and attendance

The income analysis in Mexican pesos and the attendance of festivals in Mexico were obtained from Rentrak's database. The database reports 145 festivals and film forums during the 2010-2016 period. The charts below represent the first 30 film festivals in order of importance by income and attendance.

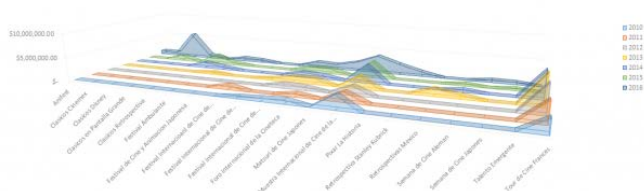


Fig. 1: The 30 festivals and film forums in Mexico with more income in Mexican pesos 2010-2016 (Source: own elaboration).

As can be seen, the French Film Tour had the highest income in the period analysed (2010-2016), with a total of 24,562,769.35. This is followed by the International Film Festival of the National Cinema (MICCN) with a collection of 17,577,231.14 including its cycle in the interior of the country. There follows the Disney Classics forum with 5,665,091.50 only in 2016. Disney is an exceptional case and where the weight of the brand undoubtedly influenced these results; however, Disney Classics was also staged at the National Cineteca.

It should be noted that the French Film Tour holds forums in various states throughout Mexico. In addition, its funding has state and institutional support, such as IMCINE, Embassy of France in Mexico, Ministry of Culture of the Government of Mexico, and private distribution companies such as Nueva Era Films and Cinépolis.

The International Forum organised by this institution is also worth mentioning. It had a total income of 6,381,828.74. We observe that, undoubtedly, the state organisation of cycles and forums in charge of the National Cineteca are those that produce the highest profits in the data set of this period.

However, independent organisations with private financing like the Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia (Morelia International Film Festival, Cinépolis, with 5,777,142.50), Festival Ambulante (Ambulante Festival, 2,353,265.00), Pixar La Historia (Pixar, The History, Cinépolis, with 2,248,866.00), and Matsuri of Japanese Cinema (Cinemex, with 1,971,863.80) are among the country's top 12 festivals and forums, with significant revenue collection figures.

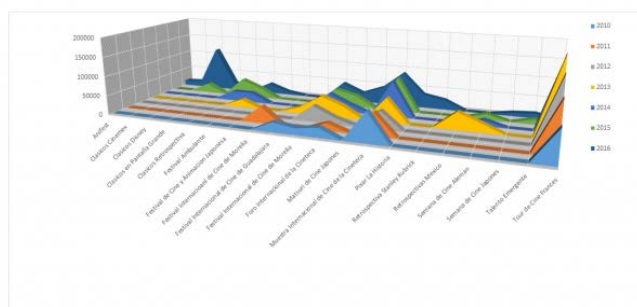


Fig. 2: The 30 festivals and exhibitions in Mexico with greater attendance of people 2010-2016 (Source: own elaboration).

In this chronological representation of festival attendance, we note that the number of French Film Tour attendees, with 758,812, far exceeds the Muestra Internacional de Cine de la Cineteca Nacional (National Cineteca International Film Forum) with 512,330. In the third place is the Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia (Morelia International Film Festival) with 240,116 attendees and the Foro Internacional de la Cineteca (International Forum of the Cineteca) with 166,246. Again we observe that state-organised cycles and forums have had the largest number of attendees in the period 2010-2016.

The Ambulante Festival stands out with 140,595 total assistants in the analysed period. This is a documentary short film festival with rotating host communities. With only 55,804 total attendees for this period, the relatively low attendance of the Festival Internacional de Cine de Guadalajara (Guadalajara International Film Festival) is surprising compared to other festivals of its time, for instance like the Morelia International Film Festival.

1. b) Analysis of the evolution in time by month and year, thematic, and geographical distribution by state

The analysis of the evolution in terms of their month and year was made with the unified database of Rentrak and IMCINE that integrates a total of 979 cinematographic events, composed by festivals, forums, and cycles, which include the various editions of each festival. The most relevant, both for its number of editions and for its income and assistance, as we have seen, are

the French Film Tour, the International Film Festival of the National Cinema, the Ambulante Festival, the Morelia International Film Festival, and the International Forum of the Cineteca.

However, there are festivals with a large number of editions. These include: International Festival de cine en el campo (Film Festival in the Countryside), Cine en Tu Comunidad (Cinema in Your Community), MIC Genero International Film Show with Gender Perspective, Hispanic-American Film and Video Meeting, Contra el silencio (Against the Silence), International Jewish Film Festival, Morbid, Fantasy and Horror Film Festival. There are others, smaller but with several editions, such as the Festival of Fantastic and Horror Film and the International Festival for Sexual Diversity.

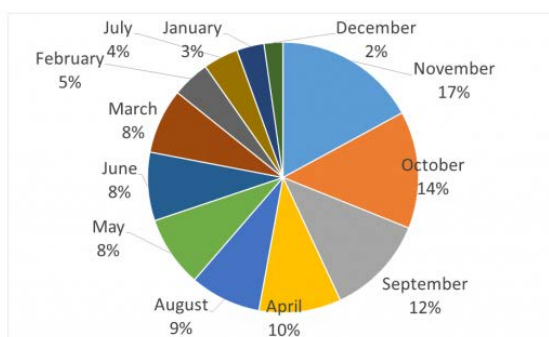


Fig. 3: Evolution of festivals and film forums in Mexico by month and year, 2010-2016 (Source: own elaboration).

We can see in these combined charts that the years 2010 (with 227 festivals and forums) and 2016 (with 187) were the years with the most festivals and organised forums. And November is the month with the highest number of festivals and forums (167). This is followed by October (137) and September (117) in the period 2010-2016. We observe that 17% of the festivals are organised in November, contrasting significantly with May (83) or June (80) with only 8%.

It is worth noting that the organisation of festivals and itinerant forums occupies the second largest type of event in the country with 99 (15%), an interesting modality because it encompasses more than one city in the country. Guadalajara also has 64 (10%) and Guanajuato (43%) due to the international festivals of both cities, in contrast to smaller cities without festivals or relevant exhibitions, such as Pachuca (2) and Aguascalientes (2).

For having the largest concentration of population and administrative, as well as for its strategic location, Mexico City is by far the most culturally-favored place in cinema, tilting the balance negatively away from other states with a severe lack of geographical distribution in the promotion of cinema in the country as a whole.

## Discussion

Based on the theoretical and methodological analysis of the panorama of film festivals and film forums in Mexico, our aim is to identify areas of opportunity and encouraging facts, which allow us to see that the supply and interest in these alternative exhibition spaces as compared to the commercial circuit will continue increasing in the country. We observe the following.

There are already many successful examples of organisational schemes in which the private initiative has a relevant participation in the formats and organisation of festivals and exhibitions. The French Film Tour stands out as a successful itinerant organisation model that rests on sponsorship and mixed financing. In this case, the State is not the preponderant actor, and this forum achieves the highest income and the most audience in the country.

The geographic concentration for most of the forums and festivals located in Mexico City has become an alternative in the itinerant versions of some of the major events, such as the International Film Festival and the National Cineteca International Film Forum, in addition to some others whose vocation and rationale is exclusively itinerant, such as *Ambulante*, *Tour of French Cinema*, and the Jewish Film Festival.

Broad, diverse, and open formats and themes stand out in their greater audience and higher profits among those of specialised topics and formats. Highlights include the French Film Tour, the Cineteca International Film Festival, and the Cineteca International Film Forum.

In the case of specialisation, specific formats such as the documentary and the short film could offer larger exhibition spaces, since, except for some exceptions such as *Ambulante Festival*, the alternative circuit is predominantly oriented toward feature films and fiction. In the same way, the study offers a clear look at the problematic, highlighting areas of opportunity for the alternative circuit of cinematographic exhibition.

Although there is a clear trend towards growth in the number of festivals and forums organised annually, the figures show that the majority of them

generate very low profits, audience levels, and diffusion. This phenomenon suggests that if it were not for the financing, both public and private, they could not subsist, since they do not have sustainable business schemes that allow them to recover the investment in the organisation of the festival.

Despite the efforts of the itinerant models, there exists an alarming disparity in the geographic distribution given the enormous concentration in Mexico City, as well as other larger cities of the country. An example is sufficient to point out that between 2010 and 2016 in Mexico City 38% of the festivals and forums were held, noting that in 2016 the figure reached 41%, which indicates that the supply is increasingly centralised.

The present study reveals important findings that provide us with a better understanding of festivals and film forums in Mexico. We are able to divine a clear trend of growth, to define the main forms of organisation and financing, to show which festivals have the most income and attendance, to describe an overview of thematic genres, and to provide a mapping of the geographical distribution of festivals and forums in the country.

The realisation of festivals and film forums has increased progressively in Mexico during the years 2010 and 2016. We can affirm that there is a clear tendency to maintain and increase the number of festivals and forums organised in the country. Film festivals play a significant role in the promotion, production, exhibition, and expansion of the film industry in Mexico and around the world.

However, it is not a cultural industry with large revenues and profitable business models. With few exceptions, audiences and revenues are not significant in the overall context and do not respond to profitable or sustainable business models with strategies for dissemination and publicity to attract more audiences.

To a large extent, the organisation of exhibitions and cinematographic forums in Mexico is carried out by the Mexican state and federal government. Among other initiatives, these represent the largest number of editions, audiences, and programming, and they are certainly an alternative to the commercial cinema circuit.

However, the state's economic model, while providing for a significant portion of the country's film revenue, is a subsidised model and therefore subject to budgets assigned by each government, which in turn makes it subject to policies rather than becoming sustainable. The number of festivals and forums in the country has increased, but development models are lacking.



Mexico has a model of cultural concentration oriented toward the larger cities of the country, in particular Mexico City. A model for a decentralisation in the geographical distribution is imperative. Investment in festivals and forums is also needed to combat the progressive tendency to concentrate supply and investment in Mexico City.

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