

Ventana Sur: An Opportunity to Strengthen Latin American Audiovisual Production.

by Leandro González

Between November 27th and December 1st, 2023, [Ventana Sur](#), the largest audiovisual market in Latin America, took place in the city of Buenos Aires. Producers, distributors, and other industry players convened to conduct business, sign agreements and promote Latin American projects aiming for global screens. This year marked the 15th edition and hosted over 4,480 accredited attendees from 45 different countries, making Ventana Sur a strategic space to position Latin American audiovisual content on the global industry agenda and map.

A Place in the World

However, what role does Latin America play on this map? What challenges does it face in the global value chains (GVC) of the audiovisual industry? It's commonly assumed that the prevalence of Spanish and Portuguese in a region with over 650 million inhabitants offers Latin America unparalleled conditions to operate as a common, integrated and relatively autonomous space. Yet, in practice, this isn't the case. Latin American audiovisual industries are heterogenous and fragmented. While some countries rank among the top global producers (like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico), historical obstacles persist in terms of content distribution and exhibition. In addition, the region lacks a body equivalent to the European Union, which can formulate and execute policies on a regional level. Worse yet, Latin American countries have started aggressively competing among themselves by offering incentives (cash rebates, tax rebates, etc.) to attract investments, ultimately reducing production costs for major global players.

While there have been increased connections and exchanges among Latin American countries in recent years, notably due to [Ibermedia](#) and film co-production agreements, the level of exchange remains far from its potential. Latin America continues to be dominated by Hollywood: the [local market share in cinemas barely reaches 10% across the region](#), and [dominant Video on Demand \(VOD\) services](#) (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, and HBO Max) all originate from the United States.

Paraphrasing Gustavo Buquet, author of "The Power of Hollywood" (2005), one might say that while national audiovisual industries operate within their markets, the North American industry appears to be the true Latin American audiovisual industry. VOD services deepen this dominance (Vlassis, 2020), monopolizing intellectual property (IP) and reaffirming Latin America's position as a mere subscriber market and content provider, lacking significant capacity to develop its strategies, infrastructures, and services.

In this regard, it's noteworthy that some of the boldest Latin American initiatives involve co-productions with Europe: Ventana Sur is organized by the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA, Argentina) and Cannes Film Market (France), supported by Creative Europe MEDIA; while the Ibermedia program [was initially driven by Spain](#) and involves Portugal and Italy. In summary: there's a geopolitics of audiovisuals, where

Latin America and Europe present themselves as (asymmetric) allies in the challenging task of building an alternative map.

Thierry Frémaux, director of the Cannes Film Festival, was in Buenos Aires and [emphasised the importance of public policies](#): "State entities like INCAA in Argentina and CNC in France play a crucial role in the life of the audiovisual industry." He added that professionals, artists, and officials "need to collaborate with politics, as they should understand that cinema is part of the industry, generating jobs and adding value to countries' economies." Meanwhile, the 15th edition of Ventana Sur [was celebrated by Nicolás Batlle in one of his last public acts as the INCAA president](#): "'I thank everyone who attended Ventana Sur, presented their projects, trusted this market, and participated in its various stages. We had an extraordinary edition, setting a historic record of attendees, resulting in numerous agreements, conventions, discussions, pitch sessions, shaping the future of the audiovisual industry'".

Strong French Presence

Among its "partners & sponsors", Ventana Sur collaborated with several initiatives and institutions associated with French cultural diplomacy, including the French Embassy, Institut français, Alliance Française, the Cinando platform (created by Marché du Film for audiovisual professionals), and the Annecy International Animation Film Festival.

Additionally, as in other editions, parallel to the audiovisual market, [the Cannes Film Festival hosted its Cannes Film Week](#), featuring a selection of six award-winning films from the latest edition of the festival that hadn't premiered in commercial cinemas in Argentina. This is significant because films showcasing cultural diversity have limited space in Argentine cinemas, prompting diplomatic representations to organize exhibitions and festivals (mainly European cinema, though also from other regions). The Cannes Week took place at the traditional Gaumont Cinema and was presented by Frémaux, who also delivered a master class titled "The Cinema (of) Tomorrow," advocating for the longevity of cinema against recurring predictions of its demise.

France's cinema as a national emblem is evident in this internationalist cultural policy, promoting diverse cinematography while influencing multilateral spaces regulating global cultural flows. France has been doing this since World War II (Buchsbaum, 2015), when European cinemas lost most of their international presence. Firstly, it managed to impose "screen quotas" in [the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade \(GATT\)](#) of 1947, then went further by establishing the notion of cultural exception in the Uruguay Round of GATT (predecessor of the current World Trade Organization) in 1993, and finally succeeded in getting UNESCO to approve the [Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#) (UNESCO, 2005). All this journey illustrates that France's strong presence in Ventana Sur is part of a much broader, more robust and lengthy history strategy.

Old and New Challenges

In summary, for the past 15 years, Ventana Sur has been committed to strengthening ties, negotiations, and projecting Latin American production to the world. It emerged as a joint initiative between Argentina and France aimed at building an alternative to U.S. hegemony. While the challenge is immense and there's much work ahead, initiatives like these - backed by international political support and sustained over time - are essential to protect and promote local audiovisual ecosystems and ensure citizens' rights associated with cultural diversity.

It's worth noting that the latter isn't merely desirable, but a commitment that the region's countries have embraced by adhering to the aforementioned UNESCO Convention. Faced with an extremely complex audiovisual geopolitical landscape dominated by a handful of actors, the national scale isn't sufficient: Latin America needs to devise and implement a joint strategy for cooperation and integration onto the global stage.

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Disclaimer : This blog post is part of the 'Dissemination, Outreach, and Engagement' activities organized under Work Package 7 of the REBOOT: Reviving, Boosting, Optimizing, and Transforming European Film Competitiveness project. This project has received funding from the Horizon Europe program of the European Union under the Grant Agreement No 101094769. It does not reflect the views of the European Union and is a publication encapsulated within the project.



Funded by the
European Union