

Mapping the circulation of European cinema in Argentina

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One of the three largest cinema markets in Latin America, Argentina covers a geographical area of 3.761.274 square kilometres and has a population of 46.3 million (argentina.gob.ar n.d). The country has developed an impressive film industry, producing an average of 200 films per year and substantial domestic box office revenues, making it one of the fastest-growing audiovisual markets in the region. Argentine cinema is well-regarded around the world, and it is present in all the main film festivals, including Cannes, Berlinale, San Sebastián, and Sundance among others. It also hosts the most prestigious film festival and market in Latin America, [Mar del Plata Film Festival](#) and [Ventana Sur](#). The latter is organised by [INCAA](#)¹ in partnership with the [Cannes Film Festival](#), highlighting Argentina's significance in the global film market, particularly with European partners.

The partnership between the [INCAA](#) and the Cannes Film Festival through [Ventana Sur](#) is a tangible manifestation of Argentina's long-celebrated historical and cultural affinity with Europe, evident in its film industry, which maintains strong connections with the continent. Argentina has several co-production agreements with European countries (bilateral co-production treaties with Spain, France, Germany and Italy). It is also part of the [Ibermedia Program](#)², fostering audiovisual cooperation between Latin America and select European nations. A 2022 study conducted by [ICEX - España Exportación e Inversiones](#) has highlighted that the most common co-production partners for Argentine producers are Latin American and European countries, with Spain standing out due to the long historic cooperation between the two nations (Diéguez Coba, 2022). This becomes evident when examining co-production statistics for 2023, out of the 38 co-productions exhibited in Argentina, 14 involved European countries, 26 involved Latin American countries and only one co-production was with other countries.

Despite the strong cultural, linguistic, and historical connections between Latin America and Europe, the economic impact on the circulation of audiovisual productions remains limited ([Mastrini and Krakowiak 2019](#)). While it is true that Argentine audiences have shown appreciation for European films, particularly admiring directors from Spain, Italy, Germany, and France for the quality of their work, European cinema has struggled to find a window of exhibition in recent years. Contemporary European films have limited space in the commercial circuit, mostly confined to specialised arthouse or independent cinemas, a few Pay TV channels that showcase European content and platforms like MUBI that focus on independent films. This fact has been recently evidenced by local news. *"That 'other' cinema, especially European, is reaching Argentine theatres in an increasingly sporadic manner, appearing in fewer theatres, with fleeting stays on screens, and limited audience impact"* ([Battle, 2023](#)).

¹ INCAA - The National Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts is a public institution in Argentina responsible for promoting the Argentinian film industry. See www.incaa.gov.ar

² The Ibermedia Program is a pan regional initiative that supports the development, co-production, and distribution of audiovisual projects among Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries of Latin America, Spain, and Portugal. Italy joined the Program in 2016. See: www.programaibermedia.com

To mitigate this issue, European embassies and European cultural institutions established a strong non-commercial circuit to promote European films. There are several festivals, showcases and events organised for this aim, including; Espanoramas (Spain), My French Film Festival (France), Festival del Cine Alemán (Germany), Encuentro de Cine Europeo (E.U.) to cite just a few. While these initiatives are important to disseminating European films and culture, they don't seem to translate into a significant increase in the circulation of European films within the commercial circuit.

Part of the reason why film ticket sales for European films are low has to do with highly concentrated distribution and exhibition sectors by international companies. Similarly to the rest of Latin America, the Argentine market is flooded with Hollywood blockbusters, which control the bulk of the box office. The dominance of US distribution companies (the majors) isn't new, but in recent years has become even more obvious. In 2022, three majors -United International Pictures (UIP), Disney and Warner Bros - secured 89.3% of Argentina's admissions market. To exacerbate the situation, the majors, backed by their Hollywood studios, allocate significant funds to promotional initiatives, make multiple copies of each film and inundate theatres in a predatory strategy that independent distributors simply can not match. A comparable scenario exists in the exhibition sector, with the largest cinemas being owned by foreign corporations. These multiplex complexes prioritise commercially attractive films (mainly Hollywood productions) that draw a younger, wider audience, meaning that US majors take priority when deciding the exhibition calendar (Diéguez Coba, 2022). As a result, independent distributors that normally handle non-major films (European titles, for instance) have difficulty finding a window of exhibition for their releases.

A similar pattern can be found outside the theatrical market. Legacy broadcasters have limited interest in showing European films, and, although certain European channels are available on Pay TV, such as *France 24* and *TV5*, from France, and *TVE Internacional*, from Spain and *Europa Europa*, their viewership numbers remain modest. Video-on-demand services, on the other hand, have a strong presence, led by US companies such as Netflix, Disney+/Star+, HBO Max and Prime Video. The popularity of VOD services has reshaped audience behaviour and contributed to a decline in theatre attendance.

In conclusion, while the Argentine film industry is an important player in the global film market and shares strong ties with Europe, contemporary European films have struggled to gain visibility and circulation in Argentina. The dominance of the majors, coupled with a shift in audience viewing habits towards digital streaming services, present significant challenges for the sustained circulation of European films in the Argentine market. Other avenues such as traditional broadcast TV show little enthusiasm for European content, while Pay TV has limited viewership. Additionally, the recent decision by the Argentine government to cut funds to the [INCAA](#) further complicates this situation. The looming possibility of the closure of Argentina's national film institute threatens not only to disrupt ongoing collaborations with the European film industry but also represents a step backward in the bonds carefully nurtured over years of cultural exchange. As such, the current political climate introduces a troubling ambiguity into the realm of audiovisual policy, further complicating the planning and execution of joint projects and cultural exchanges between both nations.

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Suggested citation:

Vargas Miranda, I. M. (2024). Mapping the circulation of European cinema in Argentina, The REBOOT project, <https://thereboot-project.eu/>

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 programme 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