

***Cultural Diversity in Film Festivals. Case study:  
Glocal in Progress, San Sebastián International Film Festival***

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**Abstract**

The term cultural diversity has been addressed by UNESCO in the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity (2001) and the subsequent Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). Within this frame, there are several studies about cultural diversity on the audiovisual field that select country of origin and language as key concepts for measuring variety in the film industry. Since the 1990s and overall 2000s, film festivals begin to create production and distribution funds, usually aimed at areas with low rates of production. In 2015, Glocal in Progress, the only film fund for films spoken in minority languages, is created. Our first objective, therefore, is to establish if and how Glocal in Progress has helped to increase audiovisual diversity. To do so, we consider previous methodology used in studies about a similar fund like “Cine en Construcción”, but we include a focus on audiovisual cultural diversity. Besides, we have also conducted several interviews with key players like the director of San Sebastian Festival, the distributor of the films and a producer of a selected film. Although Glocal in Progress will be replaced by WIP Europa, the results show how this program had impact on cultural diversity and provided several new films to film festivals, including San Sebastian itself. Its low level of submissions may be a sign that the formula has marginalized these films, although its results in the terrain of cultural diversity are significant.

Keywords: Film Festivals, Cultural Diversity, San Sebastian Film Festival, Film Funds, Minority Languages

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## **Introduction**

Since the beginnings of the 20th Century, film festivals have distinguished themselves for being the place for watching and discovering films from all around the world. It has been so at Turin in 1907 or at Milan in 1909 (Taillibert & Wäfler, 2016: 9). And it definitely is the idea that followed Venecia since 1932 and Cannes since 1946 establishing a model for all film festivals to come in the next years.

Within this framework, in 1951 the FIAPF (International Federation of Associations of Producers of Films) starts to establish some rules to order the growing landscape of film festivals. In its rules it requires that the film festivals applying for A-list status should have at least films from ten different countries in their official competition (Moine, 2013).

San Sebastian Film Festival is launched in 1953 as an initiative of local salesmen to foster tourism and very early focuses its efforts on achieving the A-list festival status (Tuduri, 1989), an effort that it will continue to do through all its history (Tuduri, 1992; Galán, 2001). We've analyzed its programming since the beginning until today and some remarkable issues are the early selection of films from Eastern Europe, although URSS had to wait a little more. We must remember Spain was ruled by a right-wing dictator, Francisco Franco. Some other countries represented besides big producers as USA, Italy and France, are Latin American ones, specially Argentina and Mexico. It's also been a festival that in the 90s started to program films from Korea and it even premiered the first film of Best Film Academy Award (Oscar) Winner, Bon Joon-Ho.

With this background and considering the concept of Cultural Diversity defined by UNESCO, we are going to analyze the funding program Glocal in Progress started by San Sebastian Film Festival to determine whether it has helped to increase audiovisual cultural diversity.

## **What is Cultural Diversity?**

In 2001 UNESCO (United Nations for Education, Science and Culture Organization) published the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which was approved unanimously. In the Article 1 it is stated that "cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" (UNESCO, 2001), so it lays the ground for the importance of the term.

Though in this document there is no formal definition of what cultural diversity should be, article 9 claims that "cultural policies must create conditions conducive to the production and dissemination of diversified cultural goods and services through cultural industries" (UNESCO, 2001).

Four years later, in 2005, UNESCO takes one step forward and approves the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This time it has not been approved unanimously, although it is still open for new countries to join, as Botswana has done in January 2020. This time the document is more precise and includes an article (art. 4) with key definitions as this one of cultural diversity: "'Cultural diversity' refers to the manifold ways in which the culture of

groups and societies find expression. These expressions are passed on within and among groups and societies” (UNESCO, 2005).

With this conceptual framework in mind, UNESCO called for several meetings to establish the methodology that will be used to measure cultural diversity. The first one took place in Montreal (2007) and the second one in Barcelona (2008) with a third one that never took place (Albornoz, 2017: 165). The scholars who attended them decided to adopt the method proposed by Stirling (2007), that addresses three key variables: variety, balance and disparity. Variety refers to the number of categories we are measuring, the bigger it is the more diverse it will be. Balance measures the relative weight of those categories in the population, and there will be more diversity the more balanced is our sample. And disparity shows how different these categories are among themselves, assuming that the more different they are the more diverse they will be.

The next step would be conducting the studies. For the audiovisual field, these studies were carried out in 2011, when UNESCO published a volume with two of them, one about cultural diversity in the television and the other one, which is the one that interests us, in cinema (Benhamou & Peltier, 2011). Based on data available in UIS UNESCO Database, Benhamou and Peltier develop an in-depth research based mainly on country of origin and language spoken on the different productions. They also acknowledge the difficulties that arise when trying to measure disparity not only with these two variables but in general.

Among its many findings and besides the comparison it showcases about the degrees of audiovisual cultural diversity in different countries all around the world, it also portrays the overrepresentation that English language has in the box office, as the top ten films both in 2005 and 2006 were all spoken in English with some sentences in French (Benhamou & Peltier, 2011: 21).

Some years later, Albornoz (2016) conducted another study laying the ground for profound studies he and Garcia-Leiva (Albornoz & Garcia Leiva, 2017; Albornoz & Garcia Leiva, 2019) have directed within the Audiovisual Cultural Diversity Group of Universidad Carlos III, Madrid. In the study sponsored by UNESCO in 2016, Albornoz shows how concentrated the audiovisual production is in some countries of America, Europe and East Asia, leaving some areas of Africa without any kind of film production.

### **Film Festivals as Producers**

These facts were not unknown to film festivals and they have contributed to some extent, as we have seen, to balance the underrepresentation of some filmographies from all around the world. But until 1972 the programming of film festivals was determined mainly by the size of the production industry of each country. The festival invited the countries to submit the films they proposed to the festival with a limit of movies that depended on geopolitical factors and the size of their industry (de Castro, 2017: 60).

The cancellation of the Cannes Film Festival in 1968 following the social movements of May 1968 (sparked by the resignation of the Cinemathèque director, Henri

Langlois) and the subsequent creation of the Quinzaine des Realisateurs de Cannes in 1969 (Icher & Grimalt, 2018), pushed the Cannes Film Festival to change its rules. Since 1972, Cannes, and after it all the other international film festivals, decided they would choose the films they selected only by themselves. The director gained power as the festival could program a film from Thailand, Egypt, United States, Argentina, etc., just because of its supposed artistic value.

According to Tuduri (1992) and also to the archives recently opened to the public by San Sebastian Film Festival<sup>1</sup>, this change took place in 1977, after the arrival of democracy in Spain. There appeared to be a different criteria for selection as new countries were included in the different programs, even a section devoted to films made by women was created, San Sebastian opened itself to genre films as *Star Wars* (which was unknown to film festivals in that time) and there was an important focus on the audience and showing films in the villages close to San Sebastian.

But since the late 1990s film festivals start to include a new role as Rotterdam Film Festival decides to create the Hubert Bals Fund (de Valck 2006: 110). This fund is established in order to promote the production of countries with low level of production as Africa, Latin America, Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe. Its success in helping small productions to reach international film festivals pushes other festivals to do similar initiatives as San Sebastian and Toulouse do with “Cine en Construcción” (Falicov, 2013; Campos, 2013).

### **Glocal in Progress**

The program Glocal in Progress was founded in 2015, a year in which San Sebastian was European Cultural Capital and a lot of initiatives were carried out. A meeting of the group “Glocal cinema: big stories, small countries,” which includes political representatives of 15 countries and regions with non-hegemonic languages, takes place during San Sebastian Film Festival. Their conclusions are written in a Manifest that proposes several lines of work like raising awareness on the linguistic diversity of European Cinema (Gobierno Vasco, 2015). To support it they quote article 3 of Lisbon Treaty of European Union: “It shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced”. This manifest gave raise, therefore, to the only film fund created to sustain films spoken in minority languages.

It started in 2017, when three films were selected as finalists for Glocal in Progress. These films compete for two different awards, one of them is “the Glocal in Progress Industry Award granted by the companies Ad Hoc Studios, BTeam Pictures, Deluxe Spain, Dolby Iberia, Laserfilm Cine y Video, Nephilim producciones and No problem Sonido. The award consists of the post-production of a film until obtaining a DCP subtitled in English and Spanish and its distribution in Spain”. The other one is “the Glocal in Progress Award with its € 10,000 will go to the majority producer of the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.zine-eskola.eus/en/elias-querejeta-zine-eskola/news/2019-11-25/for-the-first-time-the-san-sebastian-festival-shares-its-documentary-archive-with-the-citizens> Retrieved on 26th August 2020.

film winning the Glocal in Progress Industry Award”<sup>2</sup>. So although the awards are announced as if they are different from each other, the 10,000€ cash included in the Glocal in Progress Award are directly linked to the Industry Award. The following years it worked exactly like that, and in Table 1 we can see a summary of the years in which it took place.

Gathering this information we’ve found, at least, two paradoxes. The first one is about the winner of the first edition, because *Dantza* is a film in which there is no word spoken, the language could be the dance itself, and they all are ritual basque dances, but although it is considered a film done in basque language, the only words in basque are the credits of the film as there is no talking. The second paradox is about the consideration of the languages themselves. San Sebastian Film Festival doesn’t show the language of the films it has selected on its website. This situation is very common in film festivals and, for instance, it happens alike with Toronto and Cannes. In an interview with José Luis Rebordinos, director of San Sebastian Film Festival (SSFF), about this situation he said they had the information because they needed it for the subtitles but he didn’t know why this knowledge wasn’t available in the website.

<b>Film</b>	<b>Year in Glocal</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Winner ?</b>	<b>First Screening in a Festival</b>
<b>Dantza</b>	2017	Basque	Spain	Yes	SSFF Official - 2018 Special Screenings
<b>Izbrisana / Erased</b>	2017	Slovanian	Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia	No	Pula Film Festival 2019
<b>A Decent Man</b>	2017	Romanian	Romania	No	SSFF - New Directors 2018
<b>Nematoma / Invisible</b>	2018	Lithuanian, Ukrainian	Lithuania, Ukraine, Latvia, Spain	Yes	Black Nights (Tallin) Film Festival 2019
<b>Queen Lear</b>	2018	Turkey	Turkish	No	Sarajevo Film Festival 2019
<b>A Simple Man</b>	2018	Greece	Greek	No	Sofia Film Festival 2020
<b>Andromeda Galaxy</b>	2019	Albanian, Serbian?	Kosovo, France, North Macedonia, Italy, Spain	Yes	Sarajevo 2020 (Virtual Opening)
<b>Emil</b>	2019	Romanian	Romania	No	To be released

Film	Year in Glocal	Language	Country	Winner ?	First Screening in a Festival
Les dues nuits d'ahir	2019	Catalan	Spain	No	To be released

Table 1: Films selected by Glocal in Progress.

Nowadays, Glocal in Progress is showcased as an official funding program led by SSFF and so it works. The selection committee is the same that decides which films are screened in the festival or not. The films selected, which most of the times need some key postproduction works to be done, are screened for industry professionals and the jury during the film festival. The jury gathers the CEOs and directors of the postproduction companies providing the funding and awards. For Ania Jones, CEO of the Spanish distributor B-Team, it was her first experience of being a jury and she realized how hard it is “to choose the winner film,” as she told us. The members of the jury meet each other for “two or three days” and then they choose the winner that’s broadly communicated through a press release distributed by the festival itself. It is usually covered by trade magazines, specially by Variety as it is the official Media Partner of San Sebastian industry program, but also by Screen and The Hollywood Reporter, and very specially by the daily newspaper of the SSFF itself. Movie magazines and daily newspapers don’t usually talk about industry initiatives.

The fund has the support of the European program Creative Europe - Media and of the Basque Country (Euskadi) government itself, as they support the whole industry program of San Sebastian International Film Festival.

## Results

As we have advanced in the beginning of this paper, first we want to compare Glocal in Progress as a program that was starting with Cine en Construcción, a funding program that’s recognized as a very important stakeholder in the film festivals area and which is “helping new product from Latin America gain attention throughout Europe” (Falicov, 2003: 268). In table 2 we have summarized the key areas with their differences and similarities between the two film funds.

KEY AREAS	CINE EN CONSTRUCCIÓN	GLOCAL IN PROGRESS
Awards	Several. Lately two = one 30,000 € Distribution Postproduction	Two, really one. 10,000 € in cash Postproduction with distribution
Supporting Festivals	Two: San Sebastian and Toulouse	One: San Sebastian
Selection	Selected by Toulouse and San Sebastian Film Festival	Selected by the official committee of SSFF
Distribution	Casa de América & Instituto Cervantes Film Factory International (Sometimes)	Theatrical Release in Spain

KEY AREAS	CINE EN CONSTRUCCIÓN	GLOCAL IN PROGRESS
Countries	Latin-American	European
Language	Mainly Spanish, without restrictions	Only minority languages
Films Applying	+200 / year	+30 / year
Jury	CEOs of postproduction companies (different companies in Spain and France)	CEOs of postproduction companies
Film Festivals	Great succes. El violín, Gloria, Norteado, ...	So far, success

Table 2: Cine en Construcción vs Glocal in Progress.

As José Luis Rebordinos, director of SSFF, said during the interview, Glocal in Progress has been a trial that didn't work like it was expected to do, mainly due to the low number of submissions compared to the same years of Cine en Construcción. What has happened is, in some way, what Campos (2013: 20) warned (but in her case related to Cine en Construcción), that “existe el peligro de que las películas pasen a formar parte de un gueto cinematográfico regional” - “there is a risk that this films may be constrained to a regional cinematographic ghetto”. If we pay attention to Rebordinos words, this has been what has happened, “trying to help we were marginalizing these languages,” because “they need subtitles, not support.”

Although there is some discussion about it, film festivals as a whole are considered mainly a network that creates value since de Valck (2006) published its seminal work. Delving into this, there is a research in progress by Loist that should be published in 2021 following the paths of different films through the festivals<sup>3</sup>. But it seems that at least San Sebastian Film Festival considers a measure of success the career of a film in this network as it has shown in its website as cases of success the different festivals that the films selected for Glocal in Progress have followed, mainly Sarajevo, Black Nights and very frequently San Sebastian Film Festival itself, being New Directors the section that has been more widely benefited by these films<sup>4</sup>.

Although there is no official measurement for the importance of the festivals, Cannes, Berlin and Venice keep on being in the top list, with Toronto, Sundance, Tribeca and some others of America following and Locarno, Rotterdam, Karlovy Vary and others on the top list of independent films of Europe. There are lots of others (of course through Asia and all the continents) that could be considered and among them Sarajevo and Black Nights are gaining prestige and influence, but if we look at the awards that the films funded by Cine en Construcción have received, it seems that those films (from a program with a bigger trajectory) have achieved a bigger success. Anyway, this is a terrain that needs more research and perhaps scholarship attention.

<sup>3</sup> Film Circulation on the International Film Festival Network.  
<http://www.filmcirculation.net> Retrieved on 26th August 2020.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.sansebastianfestival.com/2019/the\\_industry\\_club/glocal/1/7942/es](https://www.sansebastianfestival.com/2019/the_industry_club/glocal/1/7942/es)

Besides this, another measure of the success of the program is its contribution to the cultural diversity of the festival itself. As we have seen, the festival has followed a path during which there were not so many Asian films, for instance, and sometimes some languages are underrepresented or even not represented at all. With Glocal in Progress it was impossible to include Asian Films as it is restricted to European countries, but some languages, like Albanian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Slovenian had appeared in two or less than two films. Thanks to Glocal in Progress, the list of languages that we can see in Table 3 have increased their presence, although it seems like Catalan (though lot of times as second language) and Romanian were already being significantly present.

<b>Minority Language in Glocal in Progress</b>	<b># of Times it has Appeared in SSFF Official Selection</b>	<b># of Times it was Secondary Language on the Film</b>
Catalan	15	10
Romanian	10	0
Basque	10	6
Turkish	9	4
Serbian	9	6
Greek	6	0
Slovenian	2	1
Ukrainian	1	1
Lithuanian	0	0
Albanian	0	0

Table 3: Languages in SSFF Official Selection without considering Glocal in Progress

## Conclusion

Glocal in Progress has been a funding program established by San Sebastian Film Festival that is going to be replaced in the 2020 edition of the festival by WIP Europa. As the program itself may not have achieved its goals, especially in terms of notoriety, we must acknowledge that it has increased cultural diversity within the festival as it has included languages that were almost unknown to SSFF until now. It also has included, though maybe only limitedly, the cultural diversity offered in Spain, as films that perhaps wouldn't be distributed otherwise are being released in some selected cities. And certainly it has increased the cultural diversity in the world as it has facilitated not only the postproduction and distribution of films from countries with low rates of audiovisual production, but also has provided a window for some films of first or second time directors who have reached notoriety through their circulation in the film festival network.

In spite of that, we must point out that Glocal in Progress has not raised awareness about minority languages as it intended to do and the first indicator that shows this is the lack of public information in SSFF own website of the language in which the



films are spoken. The films selected in Glocal were chosen because they were spoken in minority languages but to find out what languages those were, we must search on IMDB. Perhaps, film festivals need to understand their important role as heritage providers, because a film selected by a festival is starting to enter into the canon of cultural goods (Vallejo, 2020b).

Additionally, one problem this kind of funds usually suffer is the overrepresentation of the hosting country. As the postproduction companies that will assure that the winning film has a DCP subtitled in English and Spanish are all from Spain, this country will enter as coproducer, if the film has already not been produced there, as it happened with the first winner. This is a concern in terms of cultural diversity because it may seem that a film that happens in Rumania, Lithuania or Serbia has something to do culturally with Spain, but surely it will not. Anyway, this specific case must be a warning for cultural diversity researchers when approaching films in terms of producing countries.

Anyway, Glocal in Progress has been a trial, like José Luis Rebordinos affirms. It has been a kind of experiment as it has been the first fund whose focus was in the language rather than in the countries, although we must not forget it was limited to European countries. With its limitations and considering this frame, it is interesting to know that limiting explicitly the selection of films to those spoken in minority languages may not help the films neither the languages. Perhaps other festivals or even UNESCO itself should consider film funds for minority languages and in this sense the experience of Glocal in Progress has been very useful as so will be the new WIP Europa in which the language will be taken into account but not exclusively.

Finally, and looking to the future, we consider that the connection between film festivals and cultural diversity may open a field for the researcher plenty of opportunities. Besides the study of the new fund WIP Europa as an incentive for low producing countries and even minority languages, there appears a question: if film funds help cultural diversity and if film festivals are diverse enough. UNESCO support to film festivals has recently started as it has supplied funding for a project involving Sarajevo Film Festival, will UNESCO be involved more deeply with festivals? Would this collaboration serve the purposes of cultural diversity? And finally, there is the terrain of film festivals as heritage, because in a world where so many languages are in danger of disappearing (UNESCO's estimates calculate over 50% of a total number of 6,000), the films -and especially those underlined by festivals- may be "cultural artefacts documenting [...] languages from all around the world, including those which are in danger of disappearing" (Vallejo, 2020a: 49). One clear example is the film of image 1, *The Whistlers*, a Romanian production where the key of the plot is the *Silbo* an almost unknown language of the Canary Islands (Spain) that recently was in danger of disappearing. The selection of the film for Cannes has raised concern of this language that lot of Romanians (as the director has stated) want to talk or, at least, whistle.



Figure 1: Poster of the Whistlers, a film that includes *Silbo* language.

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