

A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP:

The International Film Festival Rotterdam's Relation with the Mexican Independent Film Industry (1988 - 2022)



Film still *Lola* (1989) by María Novaro

MA Thesis by

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ABSTRACT

Filmmaking is probably one of the most expensive art forms ever created, presenting significant challenges for independent filmmakers throughout the entire process. This is particularly true for those from developing countries, who heavily rely on subsidies, grants, and film festivals platforms to bring their projects to life. Founded in 1972, the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) aimed to promote “Triple A” cinema—art, avant-garde, and auteurs—driven mainly by the film taste of its first director and founder, Hubert Bals. Bals's conviction that the best films came from Latin America and Asia led to the creation of the first film fund supporting high-quality projects from developing countries, among other actions to promote cinema from developing countries. This research explores the dynamic relationship between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry, examining how IFFR has supported the development of independent Mexican films since the foundation of the Hubert Bals Fund in 1988 up to the 2022 edition, utilizing the framework of the independent film value chain. Through quantitative data analysis and the experiences of filmmakers Maria Novaro and Amat Escalante, this study highlights the symbiotic relationship between IFFR and Mexican cinema within the film festival studies framework.

Key words: film festival, Mexican film industry, independent film, independent film value chain, International Film Festival Rotterdam.

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List of Acronyms

AMACC – Academia Mexicana de las Ciencias Cinematográfica / Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Sciences
CLASA – Cinematográfica Latinoamericana / Latin America Cinematography
CCC – Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica / Film Training Center
DAC – Development Assistance Committee
EFICINE – Estímulo Fiscal a Proyectos de Inversión en la Producción Cinematográfica Nacional / Tax Stimulus for Investment Projects in National Film Production
FIAPF – International Organization of National Film Producer Associations
FICG – Festival Internacional de Cine de Guadalajara / Guadalajara International Film Festival
FIDECINE – Fondo de Inversión y Estímulos al Cine / Fund for Investment and Stimulus for Cinema
FOCINE – Programa de Fomento al Cine Mexicano / Program for the Promotion of Mexican Cinema
FOPROCINE – Fondo para la Producción Cinematográfica de Calidad / Fund for Quality Film Production
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
HBF – Hubert Bals Fund
IFFR – International Film Festival Rotterdam
IMCINE – Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía / Mexican Film Institute
NAFTA – North America Trade Agreement
NFF – Netherlands Film Fund
ODA – Official Development Assistance
PPS – Post-production Support
PS – Production Support
SPD – Script and Project Development
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



Film still *Totem* (2023) by Lila Aviles

CHAPTER I - Introduction

Filmmaking is possibly the most expensive art expression ever created. In addition to involving a large team of highly skilled professionals—from directors, writers, and actors to cinematographers and set designers—it also requires the use of advanced technology and equipment, which propels up production costs. In the film industry, independent and commercial cinema operate quite differently particularly in terms of their exhibition, distribution, and financial dynamics. Independent cinema produced outside of the major studio system and especially from developing countries, significantly relies on subsidies and grants.

Back in the 1980s Hubert Bals had the conviction that the best films were produced in Latin America and Asia, not the West. This belief was one of his main mottos to promote the creation of a fund that supported the creation of high-quality film projects from the developing world.¹ Since then, there has been a symbiotic relationship between the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) and Latin American cinema. On the one hand, the festival has supported the region's independent cinema development by offering financial

¹ Marijke De Valck, “Supporting Art Cinema at a Time of Commercialization: Principles and Practices, the Case of the International Film Festival Rotterdam.” *Poetics* 42, (2014): 52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2013.11.004>.

support, networking opportunities, exhibition, promotion, visibility, recognition, and technical assistance. On the other hand, filmmakers from the region have positively impacted the IFFR's reputation, especially the Hubert Bals Fund, with their outstanding films.

The beginning of this century witnessed a proliferation of film festivals around the world, as they have provided a platform to foster the industry, allow more diversity, and contribute to the cultural offer of cities. This has also in turn incentivized the emergence of an interdisciplinary academic field that focuses in the various aspects related to film festivals, including their history, management, cultural significance, economic impact, and overall, the key role they play in the global film industry.

In this context, the present research aims to explore the dynamic relationship between the International Film Festival Rotterdam and the Mexican independent film industry within the film festival studies framework, addressing the general research question: How has IFFR contributed to the development of the Mexican independent film industry from the foundation of the Hubert Bals Fund in 1988 until the 2022 edition? To answer this question, three sub-questions are examined: Chapter 3 investigates how IFFR functions as an effective intermediary in the film industry for independent filmmakers from developing countries. Chapter 4 explores the ways in which IFFR has facilitated exchanges between the Mexican film industry and the international film industry. Chapter 5 assesses how the collaboration between Mexican filmmakers and IFFR has impacted their films' trajectories, shaped their careers, and influenced their creative processes.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the research, highlighting its innovative aspects, main sources, methodology, and a literature review to set the research in a broader context. Chapter 2 presents and describes the conceptual and theoretical framework. Chapter 3 provides a brief historical overview of the film festival phenomenon and the positioning of IFFR within the global film festival circuit, emphasizing its role in promoting opportunities for the independent filmmaking community, particularly in developing countries. Chapter 4 offers a historical overview of the evolution of Mexican cinema, along with key data on the current Mexican film industry, followed by an analysis of the relationship between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry. Chapter 5 delivers a comprehensive analysis of Maria Novaro and Amat Escalante's experiences with IFFR, bringing a human dimension to the research. Lastly, the master thesis concludes with the presentation of the final conclusions.

1.1 Literature Review

Over the past couple of decades, the realm of film festival studies has witnessed an increasing interest in the impact of international film festivals on the global film landscape. This surge in scholarly attention is, in part, a response to the proliferation of film festivals worldwide and their increasing significance as catalysts for

cross-cultural exchange, strengthening the film community, and the fostering of regional film industries out of Hollywood.

Even when it is a relatively new field, the study of film festivals as cultural intermediaries and platforms for the development of the film industry has become a focus for academics and researchers with already some relevant names on the field such as Marijke De Valck, Dina Iordanova, Tamara Falicov, Miriam Ross, among others. The field has also already some fundamental concepts, such as the notion of a global circuit, which allows one to study the film industry through an institutional framework –such as film festivals–, and from a global perspective. As opposed to the traditional way of studying cinema culture through national frameworks and as a local phenomenon.²

As interest in film festival studies grows, so does the need for in-depth examinations of the roles that individual festivals play. IFFR and its fund, for example, provide an intriguing lens through which to examine the complex relationship between a film festival and its contribution in regional film landscapes through the production, distribution, reception, and exhibition of films. To that end, this literature review seeks to contextualize the existing scholarship on film festivals, and pave the way for a nuanced exploration of IFFR's contribution on Mexican independent film industry from 1988 to its 2023 edition.

In her seminal work, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, Marijke de Valck offers an extensive historical analysis of the international film festival phenomenon in Europe. This comprehensive examination unfolds across four distinct periods, each marked by transformative shifts in the dynamics and objectives of film festivals.³

The first period, spanning from the interwar years to 1968, is characterized by the pervasive influence of international diplomacy on the structure and function of film festivals. The author explores how these early festivals served as diplomatic tools for different regimes. The second period, emerged in the aftermath of the May 1968 uprisings, and witnessed a significant transition in festival governance. During this era, programmers assume a more central role in shaping the content in the film festival, reflecting a shift towards a more democratized and artistically driven programming model compared to the initial period. The third period, goes from the 1980s to the 2000s, and is characterized by the integration of industry activities into the fabric of film festivals, De Valck delves into how festivals become increasingly entwined with the film industry, incorporating market-oriented components such as film markets and industry-focused events,

² Aida Vallejo, “Rethinking the Canon: The Role of Film Festivals in Shaping Film History.” *Studies in European Cinema* 17 (2) (2020): 159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2020.1765631>.

³ Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007)

presenting new challenges and opportunities for filmmakers and industry professionals. Lastly, as the turn of the century approached, the fourth period is marked by the proliferation of new festivals in the circuit and the diffusion of the festival model to peripheral spaces such as Latin America, exploring the consequences of this growing phenomenon.

Throughout her analysis, De Valck employs a comparative approach, focusing on some of the world's most prestigious festivals as examples, such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, and Rotterdam. With this comparative lens, she is able to work on four key dimensions: the geopolitical, economic, mediatic, and cultural. De Valck provides an integral understanding of how film festivals, as cultural phenomena, have evolved over time and have influenced broader societal shifts and global dynamics in the film industry, but also in politics and culture. And just as Vallejo described it, De Valck's study marks a before and after in the field of film festival studies, and has plant the seed for a new blooming field.⁴

It is for the shifts and changes that took place from the 1980s onwards in the film circuit identified by De Valck in regards to the increasing role of the industry and the appearance of film festivals in latitudes such as Latin America, that this thesis will start from the year 1988 with the creation of the Hubert Hals Fund. A fund that aims to support film projects no matter the stage of the production process from countries where local film funding and infrastructure is lacking or restrictive, such is the beforementioned region, especially in the last century.

Prior to De Valck's publication, the majority of the literature on film festivals focused on exploring them as a domestic phenomenon within their respective national industries and frameworks, or they would only be studied in film magazines reports and reviews. At best, academic research on film festivals had been reflective focusing on a specific festival and commemorating significant milestones within a single event, which of course would lead to biased results. It is De Valck's work that is regarded as the first contribution that offers a clear structure and systematic approach for the development of film festival field.⁵

Another relevant author that since then have devoted her research work to the film festival field is Dina Iordanova. Together with David Martin Jones, and Belén Vidal they edited book *Cinema at the Periphery*, in the first chapter of Part 1 *Rise of the Fringe: Global Cinema's Long Tail*, Iordanova examines the changing

⁴ Aida Vallejo, "Festivales Cinematográficos: En El Punto de Mira de La Historiografía Fílmica." *Secuencias: Revista de Historia Del Cine*, no. 39 (2014b): 17.

⁵ Dina Iordanova, "Foreword: The Film Festival and Film Culture's Transnational Essence." In *Film Festivals History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marijke De Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (Oxon: Routledge, 2016): xii.

dynamics of global cinema distribution, comparing the different dynamics of Hollywood films as opposed to international cinema. In this sense, the author argues that

Hollywood films do not need the festival network to get to their audiences. Many plays at festivals in copies provided by (or rented from) the distributor that has been attached to the project from inception. Most of the films made in other countries, however, depend on festival participation as it secures them circulation beyond their original environment.⁶

In this chapter from 2010, Iordanova delves into the nuanced ways in which film festivals in particular contribute to alternative distribution models. Within this framework, festivals emerge as essential facilitators, acting as key players in the dissemination of international films. By providing a platform for such films to reach broader audiences, film festivals effectively challenge the limitations of conventional distribution networks and foster a more diverse film landscape outside the Hollywood centre. Here, is highlighted the importance of film festivals as intermediaries for cinema from the periphery.

When it comes to study the development of film festival in the Latin America, it is still a very incipient field. Nevertheless, there are already some outstanding scholars in the field, Miriam Ross for instance has extensive literature studying the film industries in publications such as: *South American Cinematic Culture: Policy, Production, Distribution, and Exhibition*, where she focuses on cinematic culture in four South American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. Ross investigates the interactions between filmmakers, policymakers, distributors, exhibitors, and audiences and navigates this complex landscape through four major chapters: State and institutional involvement, Commercial industry, international interests, and Alternative practices. This structural approach allows for a thorough examination of critical elements required for developing long-term film cultures. Ross effectively documents the changing dynamics, emphasizing the increasing support from state institutions and international financing bodies such as *Ibermedia*, *Recam*, and *Cine en Construcción* highlighting how this assistance has significantly increased film production and improved distribution and exhibition systems in countries studied, although in this study film festivals are not the main object of study but rather the interaction of all actors in the ecosystem.⁷

It was around these years 2010 and 2011, that academic debate will sparkle in regards to questions about the film funds from the global north such as *Ibermedia* or the *HBF* role as cultural benefactors, as well as the implications this have for the representation, circulation, and reception of Latin American films on the global film festival circuit. In *Migrating from South to North: The Role of Film Festivals in Funding and Shaping*

⁶ Dina Iordanova, "Rise of the Fringe: Global Cinema's Long Tail." In *Cinema at the Periphery*, edited by Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belén Vidal (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010): 30.

⁷ Miriam Ross, *South American Cinematic Culture* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010): 13.

Global South Film and Video; Tamara Falicov discusses how festivals provide crucial funding for low-budget films from developing countries and serve as a platform for emerging filmmakers, highlighting the cultural and political challenges stemming from colonial legacies in this funding dynamic. While at the same time she emphasizes the significance of film festivals in film circulation and distribution, and how this is getting more and more recognized in the literature as part of film festival studies.⁸

In a following paper from 2011 titled *The film festival as producer: Latin American Films and Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund*, Miriam Ross continues the debate examining particularly the HBF's influence on Latin American film production, analysing its criteria, power dynamics, and impact on the global film landscape while she also addresses limitations that such system poses, which include the fund's restrictions on filmmakers working outside of their home country and its expectations for films to depict minority or marginalized cultures. The paper explains how HBF's exhibition contracts affect a film's access to international audiences, prioritizing film festival consumption and potentially delaying local exhibition.⁹

Further in the debate, Tamara Falicov, continue to make significant contributions to the field with her 2017 paper *Film Funding Opportunities for Latin American Filmmakers: A Case for Further North–South Collaboration in Training and Film Festival Initiatives*, where she makes a case of the importance of the funding and training programs from film festivals in ensuring the successful realization of films within the Latin American context. Nevertheless, she offers a discerning critique of the persistent North–South dynamic embedded in these initiatives, noting a tendency toward hierarchical and paternalistic relationships. Falicov highlights a common framework where more established Northern mentors or experts interact with what is perceived as an ostensibly "inexperienced" and underdeveloped new generation from the South. At the end, Falicov advocates for a paradigm shift in film training and funding initiatives, urging a restructuring of processes that fosters greater collaboration and interchange that entails a more participatory grant-making approach.¹⁰

In the other hand, Deborah Shaw, has observed that new co-production models for independent low-budget films—in which film festival funds take part—have reshaped Latin American regional cinema, leading to the

⁸ Tamara Falicov, "Migrating from South to North: The Role of Film Festivals in Funding and Shaping Global South Film and Video." In *Locating Migrating Media*, edited by Greg Elmer, John McCullough, Charles H. Davis, and Janine Marchessault, (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2010): 7.

⁹ Miriam Ross, "The Film Festival as Producer: Latin American Films and Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund." *Screen* 52 (2011): 267, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjr014>.

¹⁰ Tamara Falicov, "Film Funding Opportunities for Latin American Filmmakers: A Case for Further North–South Collaboration in Training and Film Festival Initiatives." In *A Companion to Latin American Cinema* edited by Maria M. Delgado, Stephen M. Hart, and Randal Johnson, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017): 96.

eventual creation of World Cinema classics and providing a unique voice to Latin American filmmakers.¹¹ Thus, the region and IFFR have benefited from each other's presence, while the fund has given support to Latin American filmmakers such as Amat Escalante and Ciro Guerra, they have also raised the profile of the Hubert Bals Fund and the International Film Festival Rotterdam overall.

A last addition of this debate comes from Fraser White, in his 2020 paper *The Film-Festival Mode of Production: The Hubert Bals Fund and Cross-Cultural Exchange*, the author challenges the binary characterization of "third-world countries" and "first-world benefactors" within the context of the HBF. White contends that recent HBF-funded productions defy easy categorizations within national contexts, highlighting their transnational industrial contexts. Particularly, he cites examples of HBF-supported films addressing domestic issues that have found success in national film industries that have traditionally been dominated by Hollywood products. White acknowledges the persistence of power dynamics, but emphasizes that by highlighting cross-cultural exchanges, these dynamics become subject to subversion and challenge, making a strong case that these films, by transcending national and cultural borders, represent a transnational mode of production that allows filmmakers to consciously reference the power dynamics inherent in their work while operating within a globalized cultural economy.¹²

Then, as it is possible to see, when it comes to the region of Latin America, the main debate has gone around the implications of the film festival funding model, with two of the most distinguished authors of the region in film festival studies focusing their research on how, while still fundamental, the funding system in international film festivals still poses significant drawbacks, highlighting issues such as delayed local exhibitions and expectations for films to adhere to certain criteria, potentially compromising authenticity and representation. Other important scholars from outside the region, such as De Valck, have acknowledged the importance of this hot topic. Yet, in her particular case, she has focused in the complex interplay that film festivals face when balancing between supporting projects rooted in world cinema for their artistic merit, all while being responsive to global market dynamics and the imperative to align with prevailing industry trends. A different type of tension in the industry, but still closely related to the themes and aesthetics.¹³

Therefore, even when the main objective of this study is to analyse the phenomenon from an industry-oriented perspective, it would be foolish to fully ignore the ongoing discussion surrounding the film festival's

¹¹ Deborah Shaw, "Latin American Cinema, beyond the Festival Film Funding, Aesthetics Debates." *Estudios Hispánicos En El Contexto Global*, (2019): 5

https://www.academia.edu/38210684/Latin_American_Cinema_Beyond_the_Festival_Film_Funding_Aesthetics_Debates_docx.

¹² Fraser White, "The Film-Festival Mode of Production: The Hubert Bals Fund and Cross-Cultural Exchange." (Rotterdam: Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2020): 13.

¹³ Marijke De Valck, "Supporting Art Cinema," 55.

financing model when exploring the relation between IFFR and the Mexican film industry. Additionally, by getting insightful empirical information from the directors, can positively contribute to the discussion.

1.2 Innovation

The relevance and innovation of the present research mainly relies on exploring the symbiotic and dynamic relation between IFFR, and the Mexican independent film industry within the film festival studies framework. Specifically, the following elements support the novel nature of the study for the scholarly literature:

- **Film Festivals and Industry Dynamics:** Since the late 1980s, film festivals have become increasingly entwined with the film industry, navigating market-oriented elements and industry-focused events. IFFR stands out as a crucial player in this landscape, maintaining its distinction for supporting non-Western cinema and nurturing emerging talent. This research delves into the contribution of a particular festival, IFFR, to the specific context of the Mexican independent film industry, offering insights into the festival's role in shaping the industry's landscape.
- **Unique Historical Ties with Latin American Cinema:** The historical ties between IFFR and Latin American cinema, exemplified by nearly half of the 2022 Hubert Bals Fund applications originating from the region, provide a distinct and nuanced focus. By focusing on Mexico, this study brings forth a more detailed exploration of this relationship, providing a lens to understand the significant influence a singular film festival can wield in shaping the trajectories of new filmmakers within a specific national context.
- **Impact on Renowned Mexican Filmmakers:** The transformation and growth of the Mexican film industry over the last three decades have given rise to internationally acclaimed directors such as Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro G. Iñárritu, and Guillermo Del Toro, who successfully navigated the realms of commercial cinema. Alongside independent filmmakers like María Novaro, Carlos Reygadas, Amat Escalante, and Tatiana Huezo to mention a few who have notably showcased their work in Rotterdam throughout their careers and garnered multiple awards at various film festivals including Cannes, Berlin or Venice. This research uniquely contributes by analysing how a specific film festival, in this case, IFFR, has contributed to the trajectories of these renowned independent Mexican filmmakers, shedding light on the festival's impact beyond emerging talent.
- **Systematic Documentation of Dynamic Relationships:** Emphasizing the local impact, this research aims to systematically document and quantify the dynamic relationship between IFFR as part of the global film festival circuit and the local Mexican independent film industry. Positioned within the

blooming field of film festival studies, this research presents a versatile framework for exploring the different dimensions of this dynamic phenomenon, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex interactions within the film festival ecosystem and the film industry.

- **Contribution to the Global North benefactor - Global South Beneficiary Debate:** While not the primary objective, this study contributes to the ongoing debate about the influence of cinema funds from the global north on the themes, narratives, and aesthetics of films produced by global south filmmakers. By obtaining empirical insights through the interviews with Maria Novaro and Amat Escalante beneficiaries of the HBF and regulars with IFFR, this research adds a valuable layer to discussions surrounding the power dynamics and cultural influences within the global film industry.

1.3 Sources

The research is intended to be carried out relying primary on IFFR's database and the official reports from the national film institute of Mexico (IMCINE). This will allow to directly correlate data about the festival's relation with the projects and professionals of the Mexican industry. Such documents also provide important insights into the projects supported, success stories, and IFFR's overall relation with the Mexican film ecosystem. IFFR archive serves as a valuable source to understand the festival's self-perception and evolution over the years, contextualizing its position in the broader film festival circuit. Additionally, the interviews with María Novaro and Amat Escalante, both authors benefited in different moments from the festival and the Hubert Bals Fund, can provide first-hand accounts of the IFFR impact on their careers and the development of their projects.

One drawback associated with relying on IFFR and IMCINE reports as primary sources is the temporal evolution of data collection practices over the extensive study period of 30 years. Because of the dynamism inherent in the film industry and cultural institutions, the methodologies used to collect data evolved over time. In the case of IFFR database for instance, the availability of data changes from programme to programme, making it impossible to get data for the 30 years. Additionally, some data may have been lost or misrepresented when it was transferred from the physical archive to their digital database. This change in technology could hinder the research in effectively quantifying the contribution of IFFR to the Mexican independent film industry.

The examination of the information obtained from the two interviews represents another important primary source of information to add a human dimension on the impact of the HBF and IFFR in the professional trajectories of Mexican filmmakers and their films. Additionally, the analyses of the three films supported by

HBF (*Lola, Sin Dejar Huella, Sangre*) are another important primary source of information to contribute in the discussion of how cinema funds from the global north have influenced the themes, narratives, and aesthetics of films produced by global south filmmakers. While not the primary focus of the research, this discussion in Chapter 5 and the conclusions is crucial to contextualize the broader impact of IFFR and the Hubert Bals Fund in Mexican cinema.

In terms of secondary resources, it is worth noting that since the beginning of the century there had been a growing literature in Film Festival Studies. Particularly in the Netherlands there are notable authors such as Marijke de Valck –University of Utrecht–, who has extensive literature on the topic. Her extensive body of work includes insightful analyses and critical examinations of various aspects of film festivals, including cultural and industry impact, and the intricate relationships between festivals, filmmakers, and audiences. De Valck's contributions can provide a valuable foundation to start the research delving into the web of film festival dynamics that can enrich the investigation of IFFR in the broader context of Film Festival Studies. For the Independent Film Value Chain model, the seven stages proposed by Angus Finney –Development, Financing, Pre-sales, Production, Sales/ Festivals/ Markets, Distribution, and Exploitation– are taking as a basis for the research, even when it is primarily centred in a U.S. industry perspective.

1.4 Methodology

The primary research methods for this study encompass naturalistic observational research, case study method, literature review, archival research, and semi-structured interviews. Naturalistic observation facilitated an immersive exploration of actual festival dynamics, offering first-hand insights into the interactions between organizers, filmmakers, audiences, and the festival apparatus, thereby providing valuable empirical knowledge.

The case study approach is especially helpful for this research since its primary objective aligns with the goal of maintaining a close and naturalistic observation of the dynamic relationship between IFFR and Mexican cinema. Through in-depth engagement with the phenomenon over an extended period, this approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the trajectory of a specific film and filmmaker. The ultimate goal is to obtain factual insights that shed light on the outcomes resulting from the long-standing and dynamic relationship between IFFR and Mexican film that can be partially illustrated with the cases of the trajectories of Mexican filmmakers María Novaro and Amat Escalante.

The method is also appropriate as the research focuses on a "how" exploration of the phenomenon that requires extensive and in-depth descriptions of quantitative data and qualitative information from interviews. According to Yin (2014, 32–46), this method is especially useful when there is little or no control over the events and the focus is on contemporary phenomena. This method is also advantageous as it allows for the use of multiple sources of evidence, including databases, films, interviews, and direct observations, providing a holistic view of the subject matter. However, some limitations include potential inconsistencies in data over the study period (1988-2022) and the subjectivity of interviews as primary sources. Despite these challenges, the method remains effective for examining the complex interactions within the film festival phenomenon.¹⁴

The literature review is designed to set up a context within the field of film studies. Revisiting notable authors in the diverse dimensions of the field, the study aims to map and scrutinize the networks formed by IFFR, emphasizing its relationships with the Mexican ecosystem. This approach enables the exploration of connections and collaborations between filmmakers, film institutions, and international film festivals.

Through the examination of IFFR database it is intended to get enough quantitative data from IFFR to study the historical development of the festival in the global film festival circuit and its ties with the Mexican independent film industry. This historical approach allows for an exploration of key milestones, priorities, discourse shifts, and overall, the interaction between IFFR and the Mexican film ecosystem. Quantitative data such as numbers of Mexican films supported by the HBF, professionals participating in IFFR Pro, Mexican films being screened, Mexican films in CineMart, Mexican creators participating in training workshops, etc., can greatly contribute to the creation of statistical knowledge.

Lastly, with semi-structured interviews, the aim is to obtain the insights of the outstanding Mexican filmmakers such as María Novaro and Amat Escalante who have both participated multiple times in different occasions in IFFR. This human dimension seeks to shed light on the tangible impacts of IFFR on the filmmaker's projects and trajectory, providing valuable qualitative data for the research. María Novaro was the first Latin American director who benefited of the HBF in 1988, and then for a second time in 1997, while Amat Escalante was benefited for the HBF in 2005 and has participated eight times in different ways at IFFR since then, this selection also provides an historical and evolving approach.

The primary challenge with these methodologies is that, although naturalistic observation and semi-structured interviews produce valuable information, they are also subjective and are limited in their ability to

¹⁴ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2014), 32-46.

generalize findings to the film festival studies or the independent film landscape. Being aware of this limitation is important as the personal experiences of the filmmakers chosen are unique and non-replicable, which may not represent broader trends or experiences of other creators in the Mexican film community.



Film still *Japón* (2002) by Carlos Reygadas

CHAPTER II - Film Festivals in the Independent Film Value Chain, more than one stage

Film festivals play a pivotal role in the production of independent films across various stages of the film value chain, a role that becomes especially significant when the films come from developing countries or fall into the triple-A category. This chapter briefly discusses the value of independent cinema beyond its commercial appeal and presents the theoretical framework of the independent film value chain, as developed by Angus Finney and Peter Bloore. This allows to set up the background and context that is used in the following chapters 3, 4, and 5 to analyse the contribution of IFFR to the development of Mexican independent cinema, beyond viewing IFFR merely as an exhibition platform, and highlighting its role as a dynamic participant in the development, financing, distribution, marketing, and networking that are crucial to the perpetuation and sustainability of independent cinema.

2.1 Cinema for Cinema's Sake

As it will be discussed in the next chapter, IFFR has historically positioned itself in the global film festival circuit as a festival that champions alternative or experimental cinema, or what is defined as triple-A cinema. This commitment is vital, as it contributes to ensuring the continued production and recognition of films that prioritize artistic value and cultural significance over commercial viability.

The creation of independent or triple-a films ensures artistic freedom and innovation at different stages of the creative process and execution, and it allows and promotes diversity in cinema to hear voices that are often underrepresented or marginalized in mainstream media for racial, cultural, or socioeconomic issues. These films also serve as vehicles for critique and challenge controversial social issues, and provide educational value by bringing a wide range of topics into the discussion. By supporting independent films, the industry ensures the preservation and continuation of cinema as a critical and artistic medium for individual and collective expression, cultural and historical preservation, and collective memory. Independent cinema not only keeps the film landscape diverse and innovative but also ensures that cinema remains an artistic tool for personal expression and cultural examination.

Already in the past century, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued that mass-produced culture, created to appeal to the widest audience possible, results in a homogenization of cultural products, diluting their intrinsic artistic value following a market-oriented logic.¹⁵ This logic has allowed the film industry to generate a value chain that facilitates the production and profitability of films as cultural goods. The decision to use the independent film value chain model to develop this research, among other reasons, is to show how film festivals have a highly important position in the creation of independent films at every step of the production process, not only in its traditional position after production. By supporting films that may not be directed to mainstream tastes, some film festivals, and particularly IFFR, keep promoting cinema for cinema's sake beyond the commercial appeal. Ironically, IFFR is one of the most successful events in terms of audience attendance in the global film festival circuit, just in its latest edition (2024) it recorded an impressive visitor number of 253,500 attendees.¹⁶

¹⁵ Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (1947, Sandford University Press, California, 2002): 95.

¹⁶ IFFR, "IFFR Records Strong Visitor Numbers during Impactful Edition." International Film Festival Rotterdam. International Film Festival Rotterdam. February 5, 2024. <https://press.iffir.com/234396-iffir-records-strong-visitor-numbers-during-impactful-edition>.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: The Independent Film Value Chain

The interdisciplinary nature of film festival studies is both a result of and a contributor to the richness of studies on film festivals, offering a wide array to study the subject from different perspectives and theoretical frameworks. The main framework use in current literature is based on the Actor Network Theory (ANT) developed by Bruno Latour in the 1980s, it provides a lens to scrutinize film festivals as intricate set of connections and interactions within an expansive circuit, allowing to analyse the different cultural, political and economic interest that shape the network.¹⁷ However, these lenses come mainly from the sociology realm, and since this thesis aims to describe and analyse the impact of a specific festival in a specific industry this research takes a more industry-focus approach aiming to contribute filling some existing gaps in the literature of film festival studies.

The 'value chain' model, first introduced by Harvard Professor Michael Porter in 1985, delineates a sequence of value-adding activities within a company or industry, spanning from supply-side elements such as materials and production processes to demand-side aspects like marketing and distribution. This framework facilitates the analysis of an industry's competitive advantage and strategy by examining the various stages and links in its value chain. Porter defines the value chain as the set of activities involved in creating and delivering a product or service to customers. Particularly so, the international film industry, under consideration here, operates within a complex landscape with multiple players and organizations. However, as remarked by scholars like Angus Finney, unlike traditional business models, the film sector relies heavily on freelance practitioners, including producers, writers, directors, actors, and skilled crew members, contributing dynamically to the creation and capture of value. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) adapt their scale based on production activity levels, emphasizing the intricate and vital roles played by individual contributors in shaping the overall architecture of the industry.¹⁸

Additionally, the film industry dynamics vary between commercial and independent cinema. While commercial cinema, as defined by those films produced by major studios –Disney, Netflix, Paramount, Sony Pictures, Universal, and Warner Bros.– may not require external assistance due to its robust infrastructure and global distribution capabilities, the scenario is starkly different for independent filmmaking.¹⁹ Independent cinema created beyond the major studio system which prevails outside the United States, a more

¹⁷ The ANT has been predominant in the study of film festivals mainly because it provides a robust framework for understanding the complex and interconnected nature of these events. ANT views festivals not as isolated occurrences but as part of a network where various actors interact and influence each other considering power dynamics and hierarchical relationships within the festival circuit, and emphasizes the role of festivals as nodes in a global network of film production and circulation. See further: De Valck, Marijke. 2007: *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*.

¹⁸ Angus Finney, *The International Film Business*. Third (New York: Routledge, 2022): 10.

¹⁹ Davind Offenberg, *Independent Film Finance* (New York: Routledge, 2023): 14.

intricate value system business model is observed. Here, a feature film's creation and delivery to the audience involve a chain of companies, subsidies, and freelancers contributing at different stages of the production and exploitation process. This decentralized approach adds complexity, as revenue generated from consumer transactions undergoes various revenue shares and commissions along the chain. This adds to the long distinction made between European and Hollywood cinema; many people regard the former as art or high culture, as opposed to Hollywood's mass entertainment or popular culture. This perception frequently compares Europe's subsidized cinema model to Hollywood's studio system and box-office focus.²⁰

Beyond this dual distinction, the landscape in developing countries also diverges significantly. Operating within fragmented environments characterized by limited infrastructure, funding constraints, and underdeveloped distribution networks, independent film production and distribution in these countries may adopt a more decentralized value chain, and poses higher challenges for players in the industry. In general, most of the films from developing countries could be considered independent cinema in the sense that they often lack major studio involvement, relying heavily on subsidies, both domestic and from abroad. However, variations exist, and some films may deviate from this trend, especially when produced or backed by major studios or prominent streaming platforms such as Netflix. Such is the case of Mexico, where almost all the films made in the country could be considered independent as only a very small percentage are made by a major studio. According to IMCINE (2023, 46), in 2022 for example, of the 258 films produced or in production, only 14 were produced by the major studios Netflix, Disney and Paramount for their streaming services, and therefore cannot be considered independent cinema.²¹ This is an additional justification for the practicality of the independent film value chain model, and leaves out the more subjective conversation on what can or cannot be considered independent or commercial cinema in terms of content, aesthetic, or narratives.

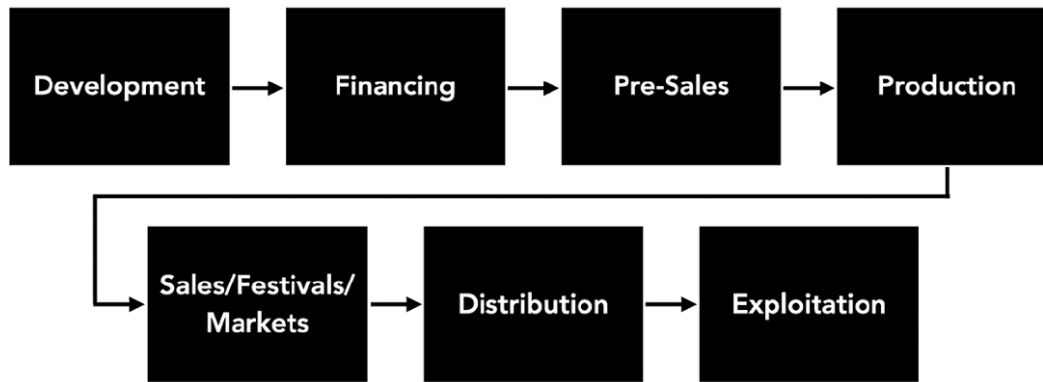
The simplified independent film value chain then, understood as the various phases involved in the production, marketing, and distribution of goods within the international film industry, is applied to independent filmmaking. This framework is particularly useful for this research since it enables a methodical examination of the contribution made by IFFR during the seven stages of the chain: Development, Financing, Pre-sales, Production, Sales/ Festivals/ Markets, Distribution, and Exploitation as shown in figure 1. Through a close examination of every phase of the independent filmmaking process, this methodology provides significant understanding of the festival's influence on the industry. It also helps identifying the turning

²⁰ Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, 14.

²¹ Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (IMCINE), *Anuario del Cine Mexicano 2022* (Mexico City: IMCINE, 2023): 46, accessed March 20, 2024, [<https://anuariocinemx.imcine.gob.mx/>].

points at which IFFR becomes more important for the industry, helping define the festival's main impact on different aspects of filmmaking.

Figure 1. *The Traditional Independent Film Value Chain*



Source: Angus Finney, *The International Film Business* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 10.

Recently, there have been important studies that analyse in more depth the independent sector of the industry. Angus Finney's examination, primarily centred on a U.S. perspective, and Peter Bloore's study rooted in the UK experience, stand out among these scholarly works.²² Both authors have conducted research on the independent value chain, scrutinizing similar elements and yielding similar findings. In the subsequent paragraphs, a brief exploration of the key components constituting the value chain, as developed by Finney and Bloore, are presented.

- **Development**

The initial phase of Development involves the crucial first steps, such as conceptualizing the story, acquiring the idea, screenwriting, securing development finance, and commencing production planning. The process of creating a feature film involves significant financial outlays and risks, and there is a long wait between the development stage and the final audience.

²² Angus Finney, *The International Film*, 10. Peter Bloore, *Re-defining the Independent Film Value Chain* (London: British Film Institute, n/d): 8, accessed March 18, 2024: <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/redefining-the-independent-film-value-chain.pdf>

- **Financing**

The financing phase of the independent film value chain is a crucial stage where the film secures funding, involving a diverse network of collaborating businesses, advisors, and investors. This complex process demands exceptional leadership and negotiation skills from the producer to assure simultaneous approval from multiple stakeholders. As mentioned before, filmmaking is among the most expensive art forms, and each investor may bring unique business needs and creative perspectives that will have an impact on the finished film.

- **Pre-sales**

In the pre-sale phase of the independent film value chain, the focus shifts to selling the film to specific territories before it is produced, leveraging the perceived value attributed to the director and cast. This strategic approach allows filmmakers to secure financial backing in advance, mitigating some of the financial risks associated with production. Such financing model has been one of the most dominant in the independent film industry.

- **Production**

The process of making the film, it, encompasses shooting and post-production and involves the entire editing process, incorporating computer-generated effects and music. While the shoot typically empowers the director, influence may diminish during editing as financiers become involved in protecting their investments and shaping creative decisions. The final edit often undergoes scrutiny from directors, financiers, and producers, with the approval process being a closely contested contractual matter.

- **Sales/ Festivals/ Markets**

The finished or almost finished film is internationally licensed to distributors in different territories during the sales, festivals, and markets phase. Each distributor pays for the rights to exploit the movie for a predetermined amount of time. In this instance, film festivals offer a crucial venue for presenting the work to a larger audience and drawing interest from industry professionals. In addition, participating in film markets facilitates networking and possible sales to international distributors. Here, producers, financiers, investors, sales companies, independent distributors, publicists, agents, producer representatives, and studios come

together to finance, market, purchase, and sell films. In the case of the case of big film festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, and Rotterdam, the market happens at the same time of the festival.

- **Distribution**

In the distribution phase, the film is prepared for public viewing, involving negotiations on how and where the film will be shown, such as in cinemas, on DVD, or online. In this stage, marketing strategies are implemented to maximize audience reach.

- **Exploitation**

Finally, according to the Angus Finney's independent film value chain, the last phase corresponds to the strategically presentation of the film across diverse platforms, capitalizing on various revenue streams beyond its primary release. Additional to the distribution phase is encompassed the exploitation of "Spin-off" secondary products or merchandise, such as toys, computer games, books, soundtracks, often managed separately with distinct value chains and revenue shares.

Lastly, it is also important to mention that the model presented in Figure 1 is defined by Finney as the "traditional" independent film value chain and in the latest 2022 edition of his book *The International Film Business* he offers a revised version taking into account the diverse changes that have happened in the industry due to various factors. The most important ones according to Finney, are the role of the internet in the circulation and consumption of films, as well as the impact of social media in regards to the marketing and overall performance of the films in the market. However, since this research takes an historical approach to the relation of IFFR with the Mexican independent film industry, starting since 1988 until 2022 the traditional film value chain model is more appropriate to use.

2.3 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to first highlight the value of independent cinema beyond its commercial appeal, emphasizing its role as an art form and a vehicle for challenging societal issues. The creation of independent, and triple-A films ensures the preservation of cinema as a critical and artistic medium for individual and collective expression. This chapter also aimed to present the independent film value chain developed by Angus Finney and Peter Bloore, setting the stage for the subsequent analysis in chapters 3, 4,

and 5, which show the contributions that IFFR has made to Mexican independent cinema. It highlights how some film festivals, due to their robust size, economic importance, and historical background, play a key role in the production of independent films across various stages of the independent film value chain. These festivals act as dynamic participants in the development, financing, distribution, marketing, and networking essential for the perpetuation and sustainability of independent cinema.



Film still *Noche de Fuego* (2021) by Tatiana Huezo

CHAPTER III - Nurturing Talented New Filmmakers: IFFR in the Global Film Festival Circuit

Film festivals emerged in Europe nearly a century ago, evolving into a global phenomenon. Today, there is a well-known saying that a film festival has its opening ceremony somewhere in the world every night. Despite this proliferation, certain festivals have earned a distinction due to their historical significance, economic impact, or cultural value. This chapter delves into the particular attributes of the International Film Festival Rotterdam that have allowed it to stand out within the festival circuit. In this sense, the particular questions that are answered are: in what ways does IFFR differentiate itself from other film festivals in terms of its approach to non-Western cinema? and how does IFFR function as an effective intermediary in the film industry, to independent filmmakers from developing countries? To answer these questions, the discussion begins with a brief historical overview of film festivals, followed by an exploration of today's film festival circuit. Subsequently, the analysis focuses on how IFFR has strategically positioned itself, along with an examination of its current diverse festival sections, to keep fulfilling its mission. Finally, the chapter analyses key indicators to underscore the festival's significant contribution to independent cinema from developing countries.

3.1 Film Festivals then and now: A brief historical approach

Festivals have historically been associated with celebration and leisure, and while they have served a variety of functions, one of their most significant has been to promote social cohesion within communities. Nowadays, film festivals are more than just a celebration of the seventh art, they also serve as an important intermediary to bring together the film industry. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies, film festivals are defined as “An event during which a number of films are screened on successive days at a single location, often with prizes awarded in various categories [...] Film festivals are a major marketplace for producers and distributors from around the world and, partly as a result of the attendance of big-name Hollywood stars, attract significant press coverage”.²³ This definition fits smoothly with the celebratory motif, yet film festivals have a complex history that began with political overtones in a turbulent Europe during the interwar years.

Benito Mussolini, the fascist leader of Italy, saw the potential of film as a propaganda tool and used it to create the first film festival, the *Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica della Biennale di Venezia*, in 1932. In response to Italy's initiative, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom collaborated to establish a counter-festival on the Riviera that aimed to convey a more global ethos and artistic value, as opposed to Venice that was said to favoured films from oppressive regimes. Nevertheless, the Second World War's outbreak forced a postponement of the scheduled launch in 1939. With the help of the city government, the Festival International du Film made its debut in 1946, overcoming the challenges posed by war.²⁴ In the upcoming years after World War II, multiple festivals were established mainly all along Europe such as Locarno, Switzerland; Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia; and Edinburgh, Scotland in 1946. The Berlinale was only founded until 1951, after overcoming initial challenges posed by France and Italy. Its goal was to rejuvenate Berlin's cultural scene, reclaim Germany's cinematic prestige, and revitalize its film industry, providing a platform to showcase its talent and traditions on a global stage in the context of the Cold War.²⁵ In Latin America, the first film festival on record is the Mar de Plata, founded in Argentina in 1954, and in Mexico the first resemblance of a film festival would take place in 1958 in the city of Acapulco with the *Reseña Mundial de los Festivales Cinematográficos*. It would be until 1972 that the films festival subject this research, the International Film Festival Rotterdam, was established.

²³ Annette Kuhn, and Guy Westwell, "Film festival." In *A Dictionary of Film Studies*.: Oxford University Press, 2012. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0276>

²⁴ Angus Finney, *The International Film Business*, 68.

²⁵ Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics*, 19.

Since their inception at the beginning of the 1930s until this century, film festivals have evolved and transformed. To understand this evolution and what it has meant for the global film industry, Marije De Valck in her 2007 book *From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, delineates the evolution of film festivals across three distinct phases. The author first discusses a formative phase, exemplified by the establishment of the iconic festivals just mentioned above: Venice, Cannes, and Berlin stressing how in this period global diplomacy and geopolitics exerted significant influence. Subsequently, in this initial phase one of the main purposes of the film festivals was to showcase the national cinema.

The subsequent period, following the societal upheavals of 1968, witnessed the pivotal role of programmers in democratizing festivals and infusing them with artistic vision. Around this time festivals started to prioritize artistic merit over national representation, there was a reformation of the selection procedures, the establishment of an independent section outside the official selection for more radical films, and more autonomy was given to festival directors. All these changes were promoted by artists protesting with the objective of embracing cinema as art and to emphasize the artistic quality of films over commercialization, as well as to showcase diverse voices of the global film scene.²⁶

The integration of industry events during the third phase from 1980 onwards marked a significant shift in the evolution of film festivals. During this time, film festivals became more professionalized and institutionalized, moving away from the political agendas and diplomacy of previous stages and into specialized festival themes. The advent of video and new independent studios in the early 1980s saw significant shifts in the film industry, enabling festivals to grow into important global marketplaces that shaped film distribution and promotion. At the same time, festivals started opening up to cinema coming from different corners of the world. Filmmakers from developing nations realized that participating in international festivals offered them a greater chance of becoming commercially successful than screening domestically, in turn film festivals looked for hidden gems from these countries to stand out from others. Not ignoring that financial resources for film production in such countries was limited, film festivals promoted co-production strategies which allowed the festival's film markets to expand.²⁷

Finally, De Valck outlines how the transformations in film festivals across the three distinct phases, characterized by shifts in the global cinema market, the advent of video, and the rise of new independents, played a pivotal role in solidifying what we know today as the film festival circuit. Additionally, scholars like Aida Vallejo (2015) have also identified a fourth phase emerging around the turn of the century, marked by a proliferation of new festivals extending the film festival model to previously peripheral regions.²⁸ As of

²⁶ Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics*, 19.

²⁷ Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics*, 19.

²⁸ Aida Vallejo, "Festivales Cinematográficos: En El Punto de Mira," 31.

2016, the film festival landscape has expanded significantly, with over 6000 festivals worldwide, showcasing the growing importance and diversity within this cultural phenomenon.²⁹

3.2 The Film Festival Circuit

The emergence of film festivals in the mid-20th century was met with scepticism by The International Organization of National Film Producer Associations (FIAPF), established in 1933, primarily concerned with preventing “award inflation”.³⁰ Despite the nearly century-long history of film festivals, FIAPF remains committed to regulating and accrediting international festivals, setting global standards and guidelines, even when now film festivals are accounted in 4-digit numbers. With 36 member organizations spanning 29 countries, FIAPF classifies 47 festivals into four categories (See table 1).³¹ However, its classification system faces criticism and has led several figures of the industry to denounce it for the creation of a ranking where the decisions to grade some festivals as A or B -which seems demeritorious for the latter- is highly questionable, as well as the financial and bureaucratic cost of being part of it resulting in continuous rotation within the organization.³²

Table 1. *Film Festivals accredited by FIAPF in 2024*

Category	Film Festival
Competitive (“Class A”)	Berlin, Cairo, Tehran, Cannes, Goa, Karlovy Vary, Locarno, Mar del Plata, San Sebastián, Shanghai, Tallinn, Tokyo, Venice, Warsaw
Competitive Specialized	Antalya, Bengaluru, Busan, Cinedays (Skopje), Fantastic Fest (Austin), Noir in (Milan), Gijon, Istanbul, Kitzbühel, Kiev Kolkata, Malaga, Mumbai, Nur Sultan City, Santo Domingo, Roma, Sitges, Sofia, Sydney, Torino, Transylvania, Kerala (Trivandrum), Valencia
No-Competitive (“Class B”)	Toronto, Vienna
Documentary and shortfilm	Bilbao, Clermont, Krakow, Oberhausen, Tampere

Source: Own elaboration with data from the FIAPF website accessed in March 2024: <https://fiapf.org/festivals/accredited-festivals/>

²⁹ Skadi Loist, “The Film Festival Circuit: Networks, Hierarchies, and Circulation,” in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice.*, ed. Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 49.

³⁰ De Valck, uses this term to refer to the proliferation of film festivals leading to an excessive number of awards being given out which could devalue the prestige and significance of such awards, as they become more common and less distinctive.

³¹ FIAPF, “Fiapf | International Federation of Film Producers Associations,” Fiapf | International Federation of Film Producers Associations, accessed March 2024, <https://fiapf.org/>.

³² Angus Finney, *The International Film Business*, 69.

For industry professionals, however, the festivals that are most important to follow up might be quite different to the ones certified by the FIAPF. The film festival circuit consists of a hectic calendar with important events happening all year around so for festivals is important to avoid overlapping with other major events to do not affect negatively the selection of films, the attendance of industry professionals, and the engagement of the audience. According to Angus Finney (2022), the main events to follow in the year calendar are the ones showed in table 2.

Table 2. *The Film Festival Calendar according to Angus Finney in 2022*

January	February	May	July
• Sundance • Rotterdam	• Berlin • Tribeca • SXSW • Cartagena	• Cannes • Sidney • Munich • Sarajevo	• Karlovy Vary
August	September	October	November
• Locarno • Telluride	• Venice • San Sebastian • Toronto	• London • Busan	• American Film Market (AFM)

Source: Angus Finney, *The International Film Business* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 68.

As it can be seen, there's minimal overlap between events listed in the calendar and those certified by FIAPF, with only five coinciding. Moreover, the calendar predominantly reflects a U.S. perspective, notably emphasizing the American Film Market, despite it not being a festival, and it also lacks representation of festivals from non-western countries. Still, it is useful to illustrate, how it might not be relevant from an industry perspective that a festival like Rotterdam does not have the FIAPF accreditation, but still it is conceived as a go-to industry event for independent cinema, even from a U.S. standpoint. This means that even within this dynamic and increasingly competitive landscape, characterized by an ever-growing amount of film festivals, Rotterdam is still able to distinguish itself by its emphasis on niche themes, experimental formats, and emerging talents, as elaborated in the following section.

3.3 IFFR positioning in the film festival circuit

IFFR, founded in 1972 in what was defined as the second phase of film festivals evolution, and unlike the film festivals that were born after the Second World War, IFFR did not have to follow a geopolitical agenda. By contrast, even when it was not founded as a specialized festival, it positions itself in the circuit by screening “Triple A” cinema, in large due to the cinematic taste of its first director and founder, Hubert Bals. Since the first edition, Hubert Bals who then was a cinephile and former PR manager of a cinema theatre, played a pivotal role in shaping the festival's early identity promoting visually striking, thought-provoking, and avant-garde films.³³

IFFR was also the first international film festival in the Netherlands and at its beginning it received crucial support from Rotterdam's cultural renewal project. Amidst 20th-century challenges, including wartime devastation and the port's role in the American Marshall Aid Plan, the city prioritized post-war reconstruction and housing. It was until the late 1960s that culture became a concern, and the city started to focus on positioning Rotterdam as a cultural capital next to Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Within this context, Bals was tasked with proposing improvements to Rotterdam's film landscape. One of the recommendations was establishing Film International, an organization to distribute artistic films and organize an annual film festival. Additionally, they proposed creating a specialized art-house cinema for year-round screenings of purchased films. The 1972 proposal aimed to decentralize film culture from national monopolies, encouraging more local community engagement, and advancing Rotterdam's status as the Netherlands' cinematic epicentre.³⁴

Bals' founding of the festival in this context, during the "age of programmers" and the ascent of thematic festivals provided Rotterdam with a unique opportunity to establish itself within the festival circuit. This distinct positioning allowed it to carve out a niche, emphasizing the avant-garde and experimental. Although the festival was not intentionally established as a thematic festival, its reputation for showcasing bold films from emerging filmmakers gave it a strong position among the film festival circuit. This made it essentially a specialized event for showcasing new talent and auteurs in art cinema and avant-garde filmmaking with special attention to films coming from "Developing Countries" or “the Global South”.³⁵ This special attention on films from these regions led to the creation in 1988 of a special fund to support talented filmmakers from developing countries, particularly from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Middle East and some countries of Eastern Europe, where the film infrastructure and funding opportunities were limited. The fund was later

³³ Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics*, 163-200.

³⁴ Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics*, 163-200.

³⁵ Marijke De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics*, 163-200.

renamed Hubert Bals Fund, after the sudden passing of the festival founder in 1988. As up today, it is the longest running fund from a film festival, and since its foundation, it has earned enough prestige to help filmmakers promote their films as well to secure additional funding and support.³⁶

In addition to the Hubert Bals Fund's creation, there have been two other significant events in IFFR's evolution that have helped it maintain its prominent position in the film festival circuit. The first was the establishment of CineMart, a co-production market, in 1982 with the aim of providing independent filmmakers an opportunity to find co-producers to help them finish their projects. The second was the launching of its first competitive section in 1995, the Tiger Competition “with the aim of discovering, raising the profile of and rewarding up-and-coming international film talent”, this is why this award recognizes first and second feature filmmakers.³⁷ These important changes have allowed the festival to remain competitive in an ever-growing film festival calendar.

IFFR continues to uphold its founding mission, as stated on its website: "IFFR creates opportunities for the independent filmmaking community worldwide, fostering connections with diverse audiences. With its innovative programming, year-round engagements, and progressive initiatives, the festival serves as a platform for diverse voices, audio-visual formats, and storytelling, attracting both industry professionals and film enthusiasts. Through film, IFFR aims to challenge perspectives and foster understanding among global audiences".³⁸ Renowned in the circuit for having one of the largest audience turnouts, it is successful in bringing attention to independent cinema and the city of Rotterdam, at least for a few days every January/February.

3.4 50 years later: IFFR today as intermediary for independent cinema from developing countries

Having briefly explored the origins and some of the key moments in the evolution of IFFR, this section now delves into the festival's current state as of 2022, highlighting its diverse sections and programming. Over the years, IFFR has undergone significant growth, expanding its offerings to cater to a wide range of tastes and interests, and improving its position as a meeting point for the film industry while still maintaining its distinctive focus on triple-A cinema.

³⁶ Tamara Falicov, “Migrating from South to North,” 11.

³⁷ IFFR, “Tiger Competition | IFFR,” iffr.com, accessed March 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/awards/tiger-competition>.

³⁸ IFFR, “IFFR Is...,” IFFR, September 4, 2015, accessed March 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/who-we-are>.

This section holds particular significance because even if festivals are only presented in one middle stage of the Independent Film Value Chain developed by Finney, some film festivals –IFFR in particular– effectively contribute in all the different stages through different programmes and sections that are an integral part of the festival. The following subsections will provide detailed insights into these programs and sections, that are an integral part of IFFR even when some of them take place beyond the festival days. In this section some quantitative data is provided to illustrate the contribution of IFFR as an intermediary for independent cinema from developing countries.

3.4.1 Awards and competitions

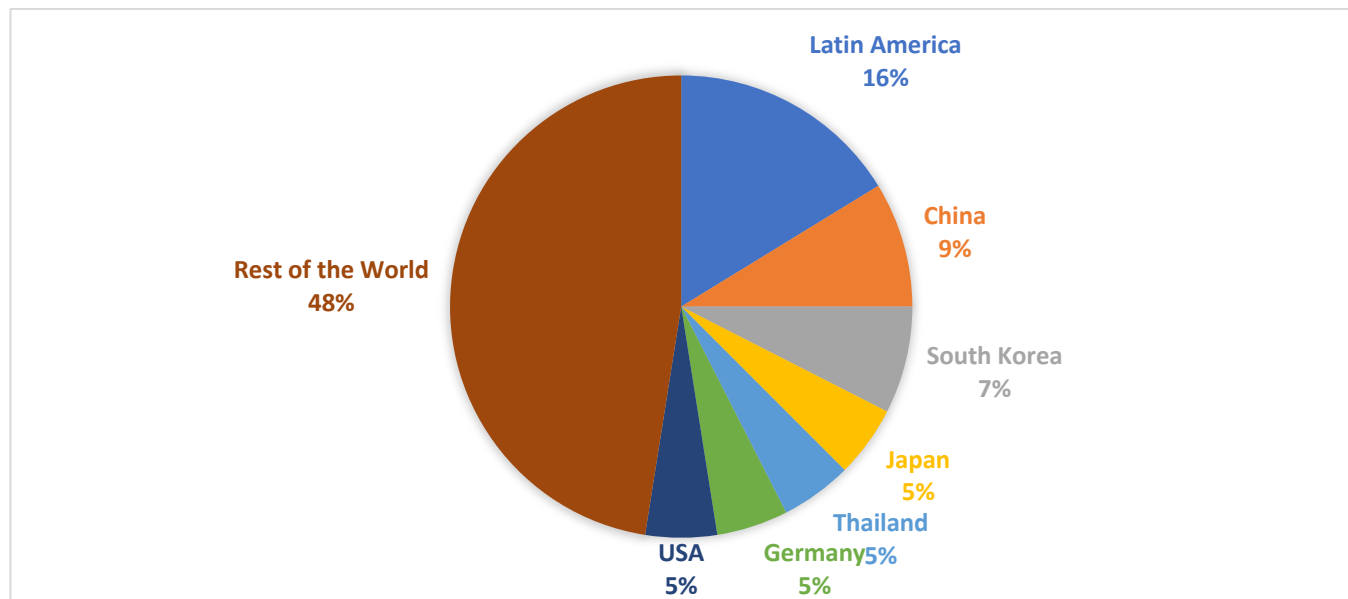
The festival presents various awards and competitions, with the Tiger Awards being at its heart. It is the main competition and “celebrates the innovative and adventurous spirit of up-and-coming filmmakers from all over the world”. It includes a cash prize of €40,000, divided between the winning film director and producer. Two Special Jury Awards, each worth €10,000, recognize outstanding artistic achievements within the competition. Additionally, being nominated for a Tiger Award brings international recognition to filmmakers and their works, often serving as a crucial step in securing funding for future projects.³⁹

Since its establishment in 1995, the Tiger Competition has granted 80 awards, including Special Jury Awards. Out of these, approximately 16% have been awarded to films from Latin America, totalling 13 awards (Argentina 3, Chile 2, Paraguay 2, Uruguay 2, Brazil 1, Costa Rica 1, Mexico 1, Peru 1). Conversely, East Asian countries have dominated the awards, with China receiving 7, South Korea 6, and Japan 4. In the next figure Latin America is shown as the whole region since none of them reached at least 4 awards.⁴⁰

³⁹ IFFR, “Awards & Competitions”

⁴⁰ IFFR, “Tiger Competition”

Figure 2. *Distribution of the Tiger Awards 1995-2022 by highest recipient countries*



Source: Own elaboration with information from IFFR website. Accessed March 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/awards-competitions/tiger-competition>

Additionally, other competitions include the Tiger Short Competition, where filmmakers of all levels –not just newcomers– have the opportunity to win one of three equal Tiger Short Awards, each valued at €5,000. The VPRO Big Screen Competition features new films chosen for their international premiere at the festival, with the winning film released in Dutch cinemas along with a prize of €30,000. The Robby Müller Award honours a director of photography, filmmaker, or visual artist, while IFFR Youth Jury Award allows young Rotterdam residents to recognize a film in the festival's selection. The NETPAC Award acknowledges the best Asian feature film, chosen by a jury from the Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema.⁴¹

Furthermore, the festival presents an Audience Award to the filmmaker of the most highly-rated film by the audience, along with two critics' awards: the FIPRESCI Award for the best film in the Tiger Competition, judged by members of the Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique, and the KNF Award for a film in the Tiger Short Competition, bestowed by the Circle of Dutch Film Journalists.

In the industry-focused section of the festival, IFFR Pro, various awards are presented, including the Euroimages New Lab Awards, Filmmore Postproduction Award, ArteKino International Award, Wuoter Barendrecht Award, IFFR Young Selectors Award, and 4DR Studios Award. Many of these awards include financial support for the development of film projects.⁴²

Prizes, such as those offered by IFFR, are indispensable for independent cinema, providing filmmakers and

⁴¹ IFFR, "Awards & Competition"

⁴² IFFR, "Awards & Competition"

their projects with necessary recognition and visibility. These awards usually serve as a catalyst for new opportunities, often accompanied by essential financial support that aids in covering production and post-production expenses. Additionally, the extensive exposure provided by a festival that attracts over 250,000 attendees –2022–, amplifies the impact of winning such prizes. For instance, the prestigious Tiger Award can significantly enhance a film's global sales and distribution potential. In this way, IFFR Awards and Competitions, and in particular those part of IFFR Pro effectively contribute across different stages of the Independent Value Chain.

3.4.2 IFFR Pro

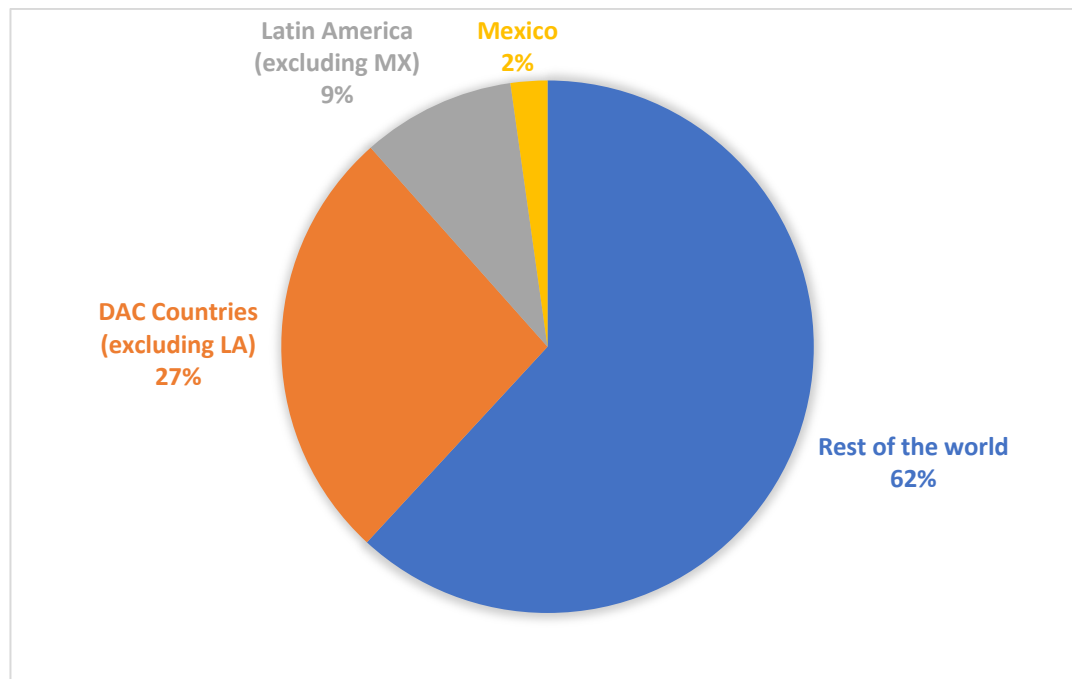
The IFFR Pro section of the festival is designed specifically for film industry professionals and has a diverse range of initiatives aimed to support and showcase independent cinema. The main programmes include the already mentioned co-production market, CineMart, that connects filmmakers with potential co-producers and funders; Dark Room, which offers work-in-progress screenings of projects previously supported by CineMart and the Hubert Bals Fund; IFFR Pro Immersive, dedicated to the development of immersive, fictional, and creative nonfiction projects; and Pro Hub, a networking and professional development centre offering discussions on industry topics.

CineMart has established itself as one of the most important co-production markets in Europe, attracting on average 400 project submissions annually. Since 1996, when records are available through the 2022 edition, nearly a thousand projects have participated in the market. Of these, 376 involved a co-producer from a developing country according to the DAC List of ODA.⁴³ Recipients countries representing 38% of the total. Additionally, 114 projects—representing 12% of the total—had at least one co-production partner from Latin America. Moreover, 22 of these projects included a partner from Mexico, accounting for 3% of the total market participation and 19% of the Latin American contributions.⁴⁴

⁴³ The DAC List of ODA Recipients is a list compiled by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It categorizes countries eligible to receive official development assistance (ODA) based on their economic status.

⁴⁴ IFFR Database, "Information on projects in CineMart 1996 - 2022" accessed through International Film Festival Rotterdam internal database, May, 2024.

Figure 3. *Total amount of projects part of CineMart from 1996 - 2022*



Source: Own elaboration with information from IFFR Database, "CineMart projects 1996 - 2022" accessed through International Film Festival Rotterdam internal database, May, 2024.

3.4.3 Talent Development

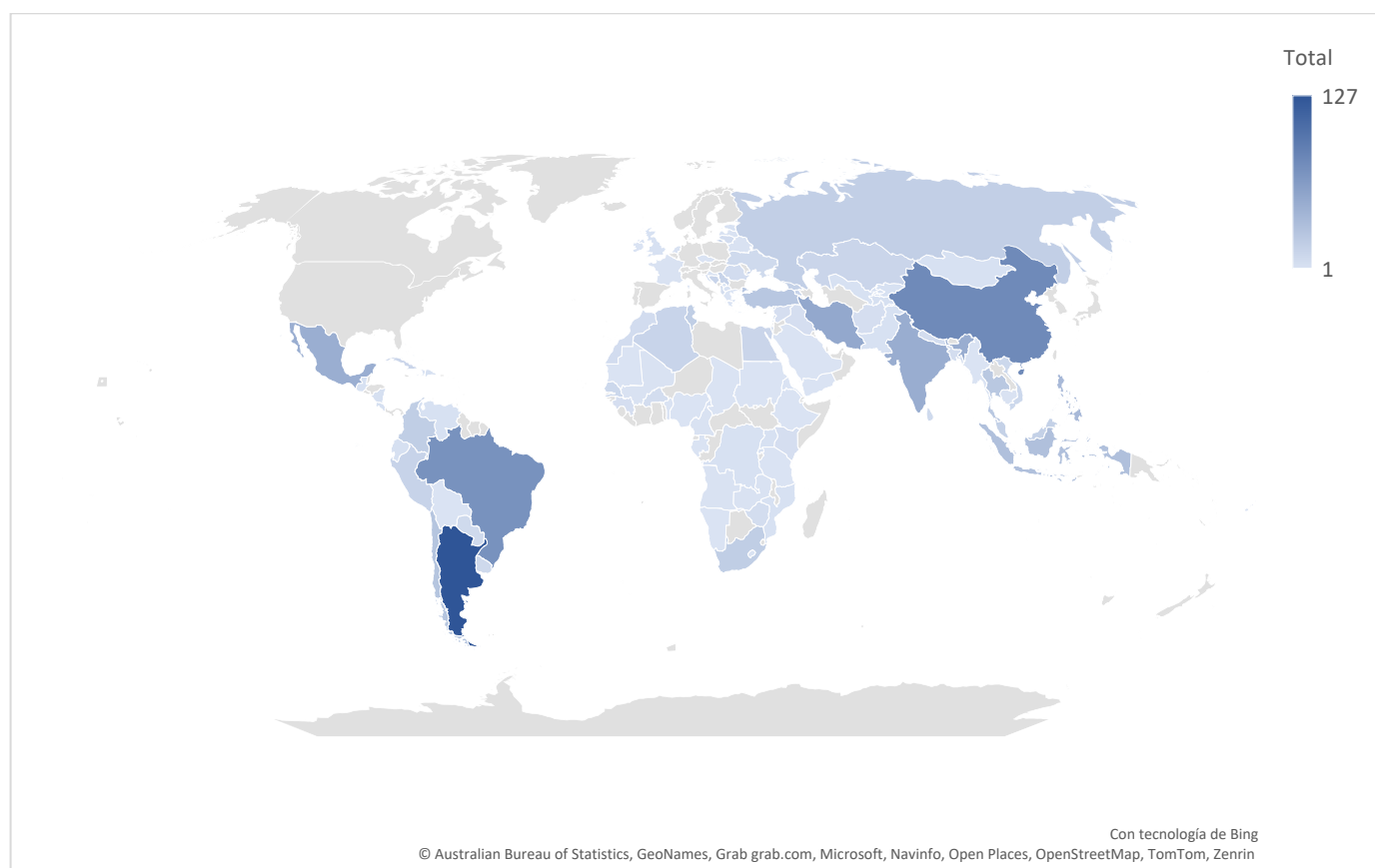
Through its Talent Development programs, IFFR reaffirms its commitment to developing up-and-coming filmmakers. It consists of three main programmes: RotterdamLab, an intensive training workshop that empowers new producers with the tools and networks needed to develop in the global film industry. BoostNL, a collaboration between the Netherlands Film Festival and IFFR, that focuses on developing projects ready for co-production markets, offering targeted advice on script development and marketing. Finally, Creative Producer Indaba specifically focuses on empowering African film professionals, through enriching their entrepreneurial skills and broadening their network within the global film community.⁴⁵ The Talent Development programmes part of IFFR effectively contribute to the growth of new filmmakers and the development of projects in early stages by providing comprehensive support and valuable connections to industry gate-keepers. Furthermore, initiatives such as Creative Producer Indaba reaffirms IFFR's mission to contribute to the strengthen of film culture especially in countries where the film infrastructure is still nascent.

⁴⁵ IFFR, "Talent development"

3.4.4 Hubert Bals Fund

The Hubert Bals Fund was created in 1988 and is the first one of many funds and grants from film festivals to support independent cinema. Nowadays, the Hubert Bals Fund “supports ground-breaking film projects in every stage of the production process, working especially with filmmakers from countries where local film funding and infrastructure is lacking or restrictive”.⁴⁶ Every year, the festival publishes a list with the countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Middle East, and some Eastern European countries that are eligible for the support. Typically, they are part of the DAC-list, in part due because an important portion of the fund’s budget comes from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Figure 4 shows the country of origin of the films that have been benefited from the HBF since 1988; the countries with more films funded by the HBF are represented by a darker blue colour. As of 2022, Argentina has received the greatest number of grants from the HBF, with a total of 127 films.

Figure 4. *Country of origin of films beneficiaries of the HBF 1988 - 2022*



Source: Own elaboration with information from IFFR website. Accessed March 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/category/hbf>

⁴⁶ IFFR, “About the Hubert Bals Fund | IFFR,” iffr.com, accessed March 2024, <https://iffr.com/en/about-hubert-bals-fund>.

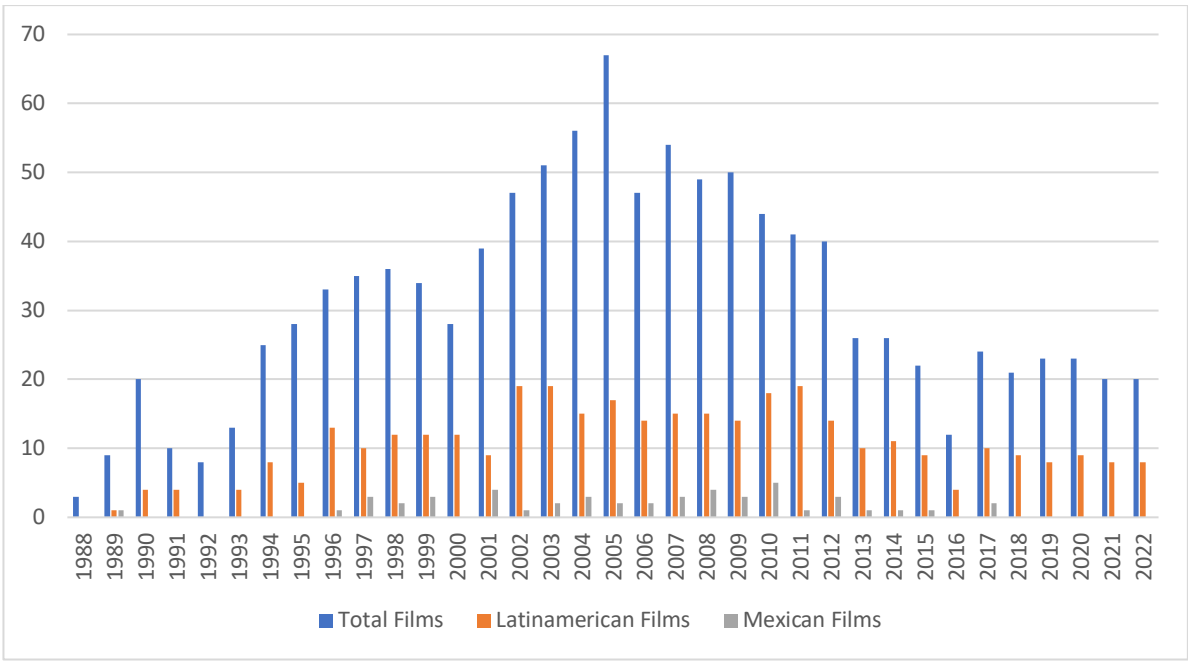
The Hubert Bals Fund offers four distinct funding schemes tailored to support filmmakers at various stages of their projects: HBF Script and Project Development Support, NFF+HBF Co-production Scheme, HBF+Europe: Minority Co-production Support, and HBF+Europe: Post-production Support. The Script and Project Development grant provides up to €10,000 to facilitate script refinement, research, translation, and consultation services. Additionally, it assists in project presentation at co-production meetings or film festivals. The NFF+HBF Co-production Scheme, a collaborative effort between the Netherlands Film Fund and the Hubert Bals Fund, aims to boost Dutch involvement in international co-productions by offering Dutch producers up to €75,000 for projects previously endorsed by the HBF. On the other hand, the HBF+Europe: Minority Co-production Support and the HBF+Europe: Post-production Support initiatives endeavors to foster European participation in minority co-productions with filmmakers from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Supported by the Creative Europe - MEDIA program, with a maximum amount awarded per project of €60,000 both schemes aim to encourage European producers to engage as minority co-producers in high-quality film projects with a special spotlight on first and second feature films.⁴⁷

The different schemes of support cover different stages in the production process of films, since the development of the script and the idea, all the way to the postproduction support in alliance with Creative Europe, it can happen then that a film project can be awarded more than once. Besides providing important financial backing, the fund has gained enough prestige to generate good marketing for the projects that eventually can help filmmakers to attract further financial support to finished their films. In this way, the Hubert Bals Fund contributes directly in different stages of the Independent Film Value chain, such as development, financing, and production.

The following figure indicates the total number of projects funded by the HBF since 1988 all the way to 2022. It has two distinctive columns: the total number of Latin America projects is shown in orange, and the number of Mexican projects supported is shown in grey.

⁴⁷ IFFR, “About the Hubert Bals Fund”

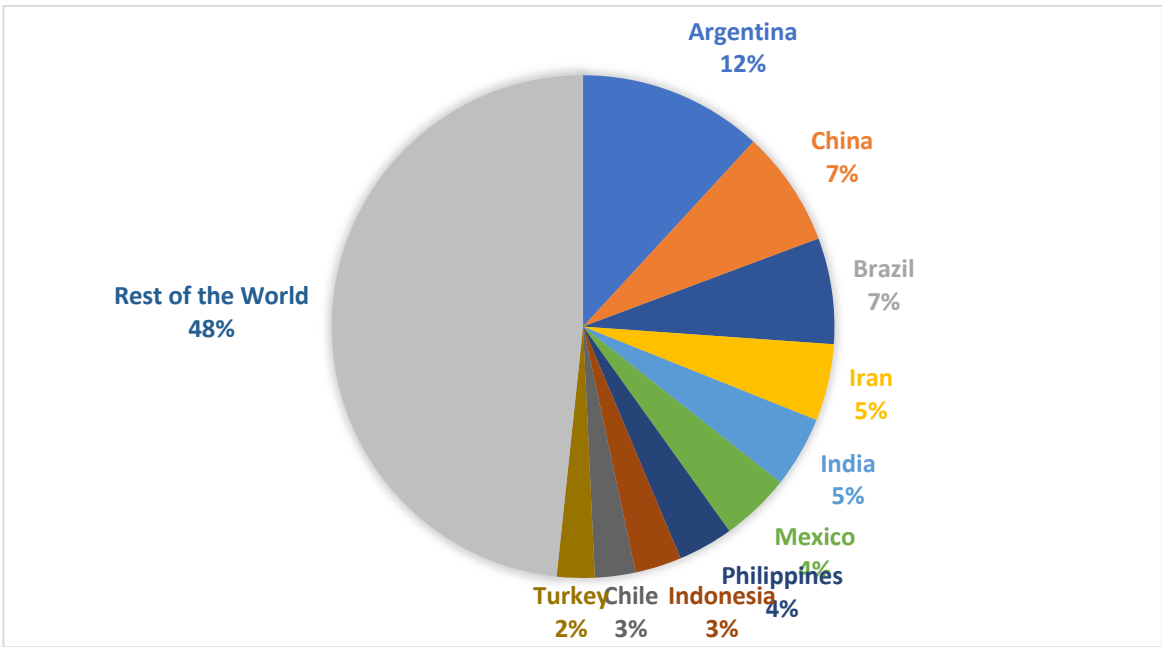
Figure 5. Total number of projects supported by the HBF 1988 – 2022



Source: Own elaboration with information from IFFR website. Accessed March 2024, <https://iffir.com/en/category/hbf>

As mentioned before, Argentina is the highest recipient country of the HBF with 12% of the total, Mexico is the 6th with 4% of the total, as shown in figure 6.

Figure 6. Ten highest recipient countries of the HBF 1988 - 2022



Source: Own elaboration with information from IFFR website. Accessed March 2024, <https://iffir.com/en/category/hbf>

In recent years, the number of films supported by the HBF has significantly decreased, as shown in Figure 5. One main reason is that a significant portion of its budget previously came from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which views HBF's work as development aid, but has decreased the amount dedicated to the HBF since 2008 and incentivized more private investment instead. Now, with new partners such as the Netherlands Film Fund and Creative Europe, the financial risk is lower. This strategic change includes focusing more on minority co-production support and refining distribution strategies. While this has led to fewer supported titles, it ensures a more sustainable and secure funding environment for the fund.⁴⁸

3.5 Conclusion

Through the exploration of the evolution of the film festival circuit and the analysis of how IFFR has positioned itself as a key event for the industry, this chapter highlights IFFR's distinctive approach to non-Western cinema and its support for films from developing countries. IFFR has effectively strengthened itself as a year-round institution with various sections and programs that contribute to fulfilling its mission in an ever-growing and more competitive global film festival circuit. Today, IFFR is a robust go-to event for film industry professionals and enthusiasts reaching over 280,000 attendees, screening more than 450 films -short, mid, and long length- from 91 different countries, and receiving more than 2,500 industry guests in attendance in the 2023 edition.⁴⁹

Such numbers demonstrate IFFR's role as an effective intermediary in the film industry, promoting independent filmmaking, especially from developing countries. The festival showcases films to a broad audience every year, connects filmmakers with key industry gatekeepers in spaces such as CineMart, and provides visibility and recognition through its various awards, notably the Tiger Award. Additionally, IFFR facilitates technical assistance and professional development through its Talent Development programs and provides financial backing and recognition through the Hubert Bals Fund.

With more than 50 years of history, IFFR has become a significant institution, serving not only as a reference for the industry but also as a landmark event for the city that hosts it and for the local cinephile community, enduring its legacy the global film festival landscape.

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Macnab, "Future Looks Secure for Hubert Bals Fund." ScreenDaily. January 26, 2018. Accessed May, 2024. <https://www.screendaily.com/news/future-looks-secure-for-hubert-bals-fund/5125992.article>.

⁴⁹ IFFR, "Facts and Figures 2023 edition" iffr.com, accessed March 2024, <https://iffir.com/en/about-us/annual-reports/facts-figures-2022-2023>



Film still *Perfume de Violetas* (2001) by Marisa Sistach

CHAPTER IV - NEW WAVES ON OLD SHORES: THE MEXICAN INDEPENDENT FILM LANDSCAPE

Since the first arrival of film at the end of the 19th century, through the Golden Age of Mexican cinema in the mid-20th century, to the international success of contemporary filmmakers in the New Mexican Cinema, the Mexican film industry has undergone diverse stages throughout its more than century-long history. These stages have been influenced variously by the presence or absence of government support, periods of complete privatization, and international conditions such as both World Wars, or the signing of free trade agreements. This chapter analyses the evolution of the collaboration between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry since the foundation of the Hubert Bals Fund in 1988 until its 2022 edition, and addresses the question: in what ways has IFFR facilitated exchange between the Mexican independent film industry and the international film industry? To set the context, the chapter begins with a brief overview of the evolution of the Mexican film industry from its beginnings in 1896 to 2022. This is followed by a broad picture of the current state of the film industry within the Latin American context to understand its regional importance and to provide a comparative approach. Finally, the chapter presents quantitative data on the

relationship between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry, framed within the independent film value chain, to illustrate the various ways IFFR has contributed to different stages of the film production process in some key moments of the Mexican Film industry.

4.1 The evolution of the Mexican film industry

Film first arrived in Mexico in 1896 when French cinematographer Lumière brought moving images to the country with the creation of the first short films. However, it was until the tumultuous years of the Mexican Revolution that the first feature-length films were developed by Mexican filmmakers, since then film has always been part of Mexican culture.

The introduction of sound in films during the 1930s, coupled with disruptions in the European and US film industries due to war, and a national strategy to consolidate the film industry paved the way for the emergence of the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema, spanning from the early 1930s to the late 1950s. According to Martínez et al., several key actions fuelled the industry's growth during this period. Firstly, President Lázaro Cárdenas instituted "screen time" in 1939, reserving certain days each year exclusively for Mexican films. Secondly, in the late 1940s, the government provided funding to the Cinematográfica Latinoamericana, S.A. (CLASA) to support filmmaking. Thirdly, Mexico's alignment with the Allies during World War II facilitated access to film stock, financing, and equipment. Fourthly, the establishment of the National Film Bank offered crucial financial support and spearheaded technological advancements. Additionally, legislation was enacted to exempt taxes on Mexican films and imports. Fifthly, the creation of new national distributors, Películas Mexicanas and Películas Nacionales, aimed to broaden the market reach. Sixthly, the formation of the National Film Commission in 1947 to promote Mexican cinema, complemented by the passage of the Film Law in 1949, aimed at industry regulation. Lastly, diminished competition from the United States during the war allowed Mexican filmmakers to explore diverse themes and narratives.⁵⁰ As a result, this was a period of booming for the industry, peaking in 1957 with 137 productions. It would take the Mexican film industry 58 years to reach and surpass that total once more, until 2015 when 140 full-length feature films were produced in the country.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Jorge Mario Martínez Piva, Ramón Padilla, Claudia Schatan, and Verónica Vega Montoya, "The Mexican Film Industry and Its Participation in the Global Value Chain," *Serie Estudios y Perspectivas CEPAL*, October 2011, 23-26.

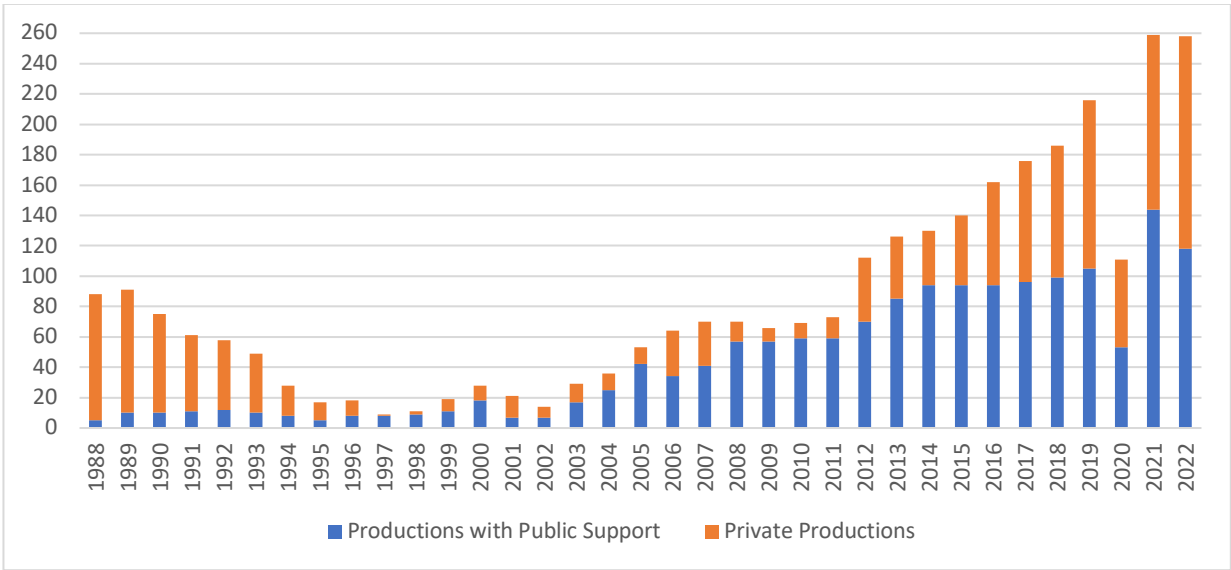
<https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/4916-mexican-film-industry-and-its-participation-global-value-chain>.

⁵¹ Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (IMCINE), *Anuario del Cine Mexicano 2022*, 31.

With the end of the Golden Age, the industry got into a crisis that led the government to take more control of the industry and to generate a series of measures to promote film production. In the 1970s a training and educational centre for cinema was founded (the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, CCC), the Mexican Academy of Film Arts and Sciences was re-established, the Ariel Award was created, among others, permitting the state to participate in all parts of the value chain of film production. However, by the end of that decade and beginning of the 1980s this infrastructure and the national strategy of the Golden Age was dismantled bringing a short period of complete privatization of the industry characterized by low-cost and low-quality films.⁵²

Amidst this crisis, in 1983, the Mexican Film Institute –IMCINE– was created to promote once again the production of Mexican Cinema. However, the number of film productions continued to decline also being severely affected by the economic crises that hit the country in 1994, and the signing of the North American Trade Agreement –NAFTA– in the same year which affected the production, distribution, and exhibition of Mexican cinema in the country.⁵³ All of these, lead the film production to reach its historical lowest point in 1997 when only nine movies were produced, and made the 1990s the worst decade for film production in the country, as it can be seen in figure 7.

Figure 7. Total of production in process and finished in Mexico 1988 - 2022



Source: Own elaboration with information from the Statistical Yearbook of Mexican Cinema (Mexico City: IMCINE, 2023), 31.

⁵²Jorge Mario Martínez, et al. “The Mexican Film Industry”, 24.

⁵³ There are different studies that analyze the consequences of the NAFTAs signing on Mexican cinema, mainly because of the lack of a cultural exception for cinematography that protected the industry from fierce competition with Hollywood. This omission has had important consequences particularly in the exhibition and distribution steps of the value chain. See further: Sánchez Prado, Ignacio. 2024. “México: Un Cine Sin Cines.” *Nexos: Sociedad, Ciencia, Literatura* 46 (553).

It is also around this same time, that the Hubert Bals Fund was founded, when the Mexican industry started to decline. If we cherry-pick the year 1997 as an example, the Hubert Bals Fund helped with the project development and screenplay for María Novaro's film *Sin Dejar Huella, En el país donde no pasa nada* by María del Carmen de Lara, and *Fibra Óptica* by Francisco Athié. In the same year, Mexico only produced nine films, meaning that the HBF's contributed in around 33% of the country's total film output. Although these films were not premiered in that year. Additionally, five Mexican films were screened at IFFR 1997 edition, contributing to their international exhibition. Throughout the entire 1990s, Mexico produced approximately 345 films, with the HBF partially supporting ten of them, representing roughly 3.5% of the decade's total national film production.

Since the mid-2000s, after the crises in the industry, the number of productions has continuously grown, with the exception of 2020, when film production fell by half compared to 2019 (111 films) due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. However, by 2022, a new record was set with 258 full-length feature films produced in the country. To aid recovery, IMCINE created various instruments to promote the production side of the industry: the Fund for Quality Film Production (FOPROCINE) in 1997, the Fund for Investment and Stimulus for Cinema (FIDECINE) in 1998, the Tax Stimulus for Investment Projects in National Film Production (EFICINE 226) in 2007, and in 2021, the Program for the Promotion of Mexican Cinema (FOCINE), which replaced FIDECINE and FOPROCINE, and until this day remains controversial.⁵⁴

All these instruments, among other factors, facilitated what is now known as the *Nuevo Cine Mexicano* (New Mexican Cinema), a new generation of Mexican filmmakers that emerged with great impulse. The filmmakers of New Mexican cinema tried to combine the representation of social issues with a fresh and innovative approach to storytelling. Some of them have made a successful way on the international scene, such as those often referred to as the *Three Amigos* Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro G. Iñárritu, and Guillermo del Toro. However, critics such as Meza (2006) highlight the "double-edged sword" of this success, noting that while it elevates Mexican cinema globally, it also draws talent away from the national industry. Authors such as the *Three Amigos*, have faced significant challenges balancing their careers between Mexico and the United States.⁵⁵ Moreover, the rebirth of the industry has also brought new and diverse voices from independent filmmakers, such as María Novaro and Amat Escalante, among others, who have notably

⁵⁴ Original names of the instruments in Spanish: Fondo para la Producción Cinematográfica de Calidad (FOPROCINE), Fondo de Inversión y Estímulos al Cine (FIDECINE), Estímulo Fiscal a Proyectos de Inversión en la Producción Cinematográfica Nacional (EFICINE 226), and Programa de Fomento al Cine Mexicano (FOCINE).

⁵⁵ Maximiliano Maza, "1995: El talent Migrante," <http://cinemexicano.mty.itesm.mx/front.html>, archived October 6, 2006, accessed May 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061012180450/http://cinemexicano.mty.itesm.mx/coda.html>.

showcased their work in Rotterdam throughout their careers and garnered multiple awards at various film festivals, including Cannes, Berlin, and Venice.

Although Mexican cinema has experienced an important recovery in the last couple of decades, it still faces some challenges, mainly related to the exhibition and distribution sides of the value chain. On the one hand, the industry is producing abundantly, but on the other, there is a lack of audiences for Mexican Cinema, as well as an infrastructure to support and disseminate these works effectively.⁵⁶

4.2 The Mexican Film Industry today

In 2000, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a report on national cinematography in which they analysed, by means of a worldwide survey from 1988 to 1999, the situation of different national cinematography sectors, making different categorizations in terms of production capacity and potential for participating in international trade. The three different categories were: small (1-10 films per year), medium (20-199 films per year), and large (+200 films per year). At that moment, with the industry in its worst crises, Mexico was considered a small-producing country with an average of 10 films per year. In 2022, with 258 films produced and in production it would be clustered in the group of large-producers. However, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, has not carried out the survey again, and make such a simple comparison today would be unfair since most of the large producers at that time (U.S., Japan, etc.) have also importantly multiplied their film production as well. This information, however, is still important to set up the evolution of the Mexican film industry in a broader context.

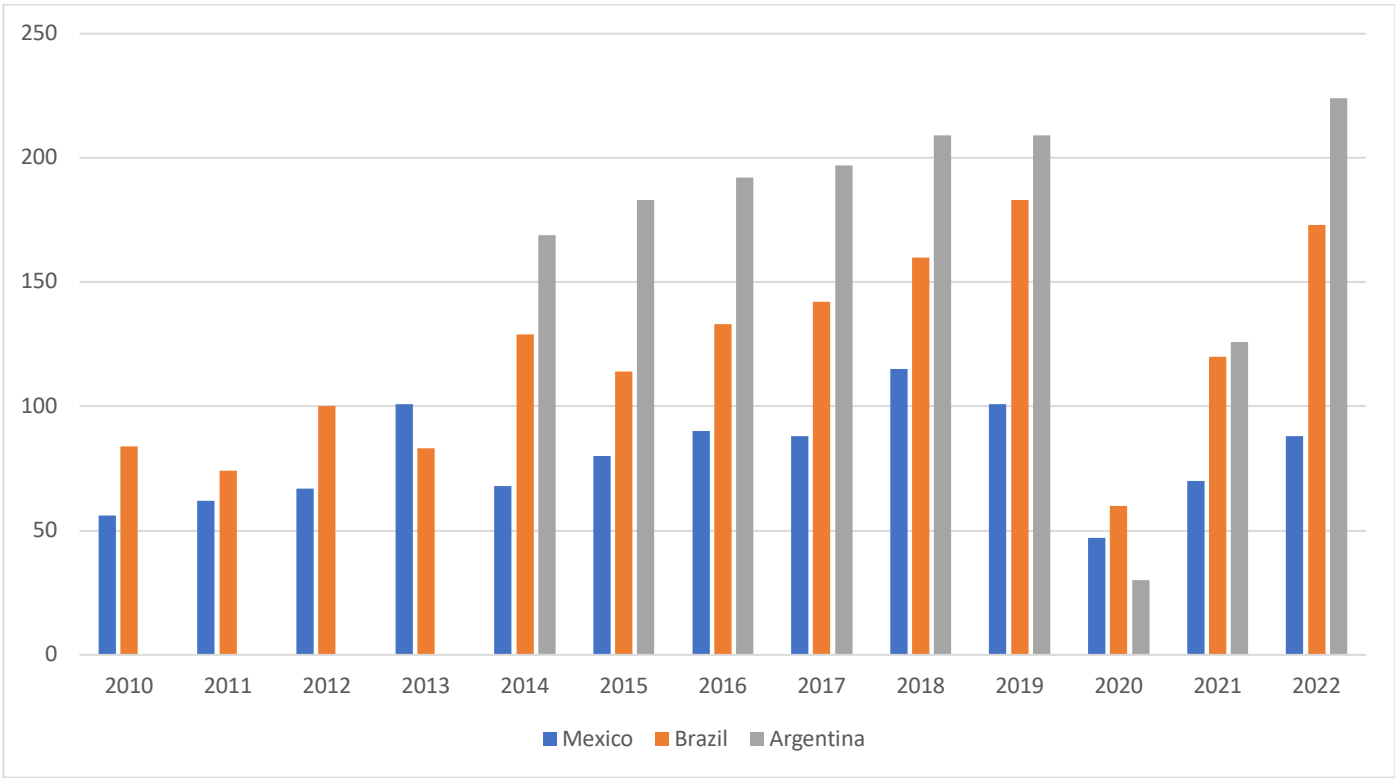
Today, the Mexican film industry is vibrant, employing 11,809 professionals in film production and standing as one of the most important cultural industries in the country. In 2021, it accounted for 35% of the GDP of culture, included in audiovisual media, the total of GDP of culture in the country accounted for 3%. In 2022, 258 films were produced or in production, with 46% receiving public support and 75 of them being international co-productions, 14 of these films were produced by Netflix, Disney and Paramount for their streaming services, so the remaining 244 films can be considered independent cinema. Some Mexican films also achieved international success, with 49 films released abroad and earning 195 international awards. Domestically, 173 million tickets were sold in movie theatre complexes, although only 6.4 million were for Mexican films. Currently, the country hosts 234 film festivals and events annually, and there are 56 regular calls for entries for incentives and economic support, operating through various federal and state instruments,

⁵⁶ Ignacio Sánchez Prado, "México: Un Cine Sin Cines," *Nexos: Sociedad, Ciencia, Literatura* 46, no. 553 (2024), <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A781910507/AONE?u=glasuni&sid=summon&xid=cb4265cc>.

which facilitate ongoing growth and development in the industry. Additionally, there are 282 technical careers, undergraduate and graduate programs, and specialties in film and audio-visuals offered across 115 educational centres.⁵⁷

Even though the industry has significantly recovered from the dark decades following the Golden Age, it is still catching up compared to other major economies leading the film industry in the region. According to Statista, using data from the respective film institutes of each country, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico are currently the leading film producers in Latin America, the total production can be seen in figure 8. These three countries also have the largest markets for the film industry in the region.

Figure 8. *Number of domestic films released in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina 2010 - 2022*



Source: Own elaboration with data from Statista, "The Global Box Office," accessed June, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/259987/global-box-office-revenue>.

In the case of Mexico, it is important to distinguish between the number of domestic films released in national cinemas and those produced or in production, as reported by IMCINE in figure 7, which makes the

⁵⁷ Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (IMCINE), *Anuario del Cine Mexicano 2022*, 13.

substantial different in both figures.⁵⁸ This distinction is also an indicator of the ongoing challenge the industry faces regarding the exhibition stage of filmmaking. Despite consistently having over 100 movies in production each year since 2012 (except for 2020), the country has only surpassed 100 film releases in national theatres in the years 2013, 2018, and 2019. It is also worth noting that the issue relates to the actual consumption of domestic cinema in the country. In 2022, Mexico recorded the highest box office revenue in Latin America, with over 598 million U.S. dollars. This amount exceeded the combined revenue of the second (Brazil) and third (Argentina) largest markets, positioning Mexico as the country with the fourth highest movie theatre attendance in 2022, just behind China, the United States, and India.⁵⁹

However, understanding the film consumption dynamics, and the structural problems related to exhibition of the Mexican film industry go beyond the reach of this research. Here, it is only important to highlight that film festivals can play a crucial role as a platform get into new international markets and to increase the visibility of films both nationally and internationally. Finally, the international recognition that films receive at festivals can significantly enhance their reception upon release. In this sense, the support that Mexican independent film projects can receive from festivals like IFFR has become more valuable particularly in stages that impact the distribution and exhibition of films, where Mexican films are struggling the most.

4.3 The Mexican independent film industry at IFFR

By exploring the relationship between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry, using the framework of the independent film value chain, as outlined by Angus Finney, it is possible to get a better understanding and close examination of the evolution of the long relation between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry. By analyzing each phase, it is also possible to identify the key points where the festival was particularly more impactful. Unfortunately, it is not possible to have a uniform historical approach since the year from which the data is available in IFFR database changes from programme to programme. For instance, it is possible to get the number of Mexican industry participants in CineMart only from 1995, and from the talent development programs only from 2017, as opposed from the Hubert Bals Fund, which is available since 1988.

⁵⁸ It is important to consider the different methods used by national film agencies or institutes to report their statistics. This is why the comparison was made using homogenized data from Statista. Consequently, the number of Mexican films in this section differ from the ones reported by IMCINE.

⁵⁹ El Economista, "México Ama El Cine: Es El Cuarto País Con La Mayor Audiencia a Las Salas," *El Economista*, December 14, 2023. Accessed May 2, 2024: <https://mexicodailynews.com/2023/12/14/mexico-loves-cinema-it-is-the-fourth-country-with-the-largest-audience-in-theaters/>.

Development:

This is the initial phase and involves conceptualizing the story, screenwriting, securing development finance, and commencing production planning. Since 1988, 34 Mexican film projects have been supported for Script and Project Development, and since 2017, 13 Mexican film professionals have been part of the talent development programs, such as RotterdamLab.

The support at this stage was particularly fundamental during the 1990s, when financial and moral backing was essential for Mexican filmmakers trying to push ahead their projects in an industry that had no support mechanisms. With the beginning of the New Mexican Cinema in the early 2000s, HBF's support in the development stage remained important, but now mainly for bold film projects that would struggle to find financiers due to their unconventional nature or harsh themes, such as those proposed by Amat Escalante.

Financing:

During the financing phase, securing funds to start the production is critical, IFFR through the HBF has supported 52 Mexican film projects at different stages, emphasizing the significance of the moral backing more than the financial in realizing film projects, since most of the times, at least when it comes to the Mexican projects, the funds granted by the HBF represent only a small percentage of the film's total production cost. However, being a beneficiary of prestigious fund, acts as a stamp of trust, opening doors to further financing with international partners and facilitating potential co-production schemes.

Nowadays, most Mexican films have budgets that surpass the grants from the HBF. However, during the critical years of the 1990s, having funding that could go directly into production or facilitate pre-production, such as support for Script and Project Development, was a privilege enjoyed by only a few, since there were no financial mechanisms for cinema in Mexico. In that scenario, the financial support provided by the HBF allowed the creation of films that would have otherwise remained unmade.

Pre-sales:

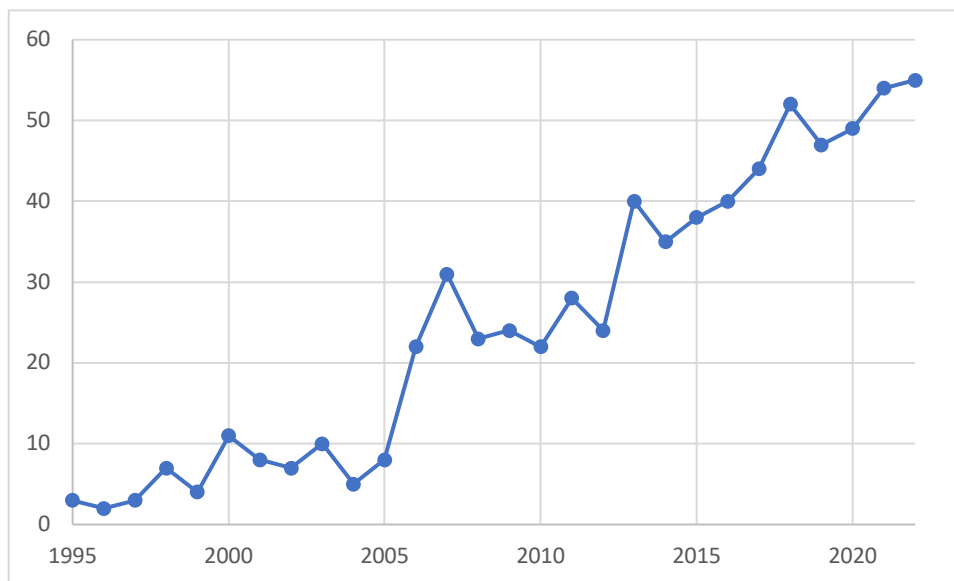
In the pre-sale phase, filmmakers sell their films to specific territories before production, leveraging the perceived value of the director and cast. Since 1995, 22 Mexican films have participated in CineMart, IFFR's co-production market, highlighting the importance of entering the European market and establishing co-production schemes. Out of the 22 films that have participated in CineMart, 13 secured co-production schemes that allowed them to either complete their production or finance their post-production. Getting into a

co-production scheme also facilitates potential distribution in foreign markets. Access to international audiences has been fundamental for independent Mexican film productions, as they often struggle to engage with domestic audiences.

Production:

This phase includes shooting, post-production, and editing. Eighteen Mexican projects have benefited from HBF support during production and post-production. Additionally, 660 Mexican professionals have participated in IFFR's industry activities since 1995. Here is important to mention the correlation in the growth of the Mexican film industry with the number of Mexican professionals participating in the industry activities of IFFR's film market, CineMart, as it can be seen in figure 9.

Figure 9. *Number of Mexican film industry professionals participating in CineMart 1995 - 2022*



Source: Own elaboration with information from IFFR Database, "IFFR Pro Accreditations – Mexico 1995 - 2022" accessed through International Film Festival Rotterdam internal database, May, 2024.

This could also be correlated to the perceived value that participating in IFFR Pro activities provides to Mexican film professionals seeking to access the European film market.

Sales/Festivals/Markets:

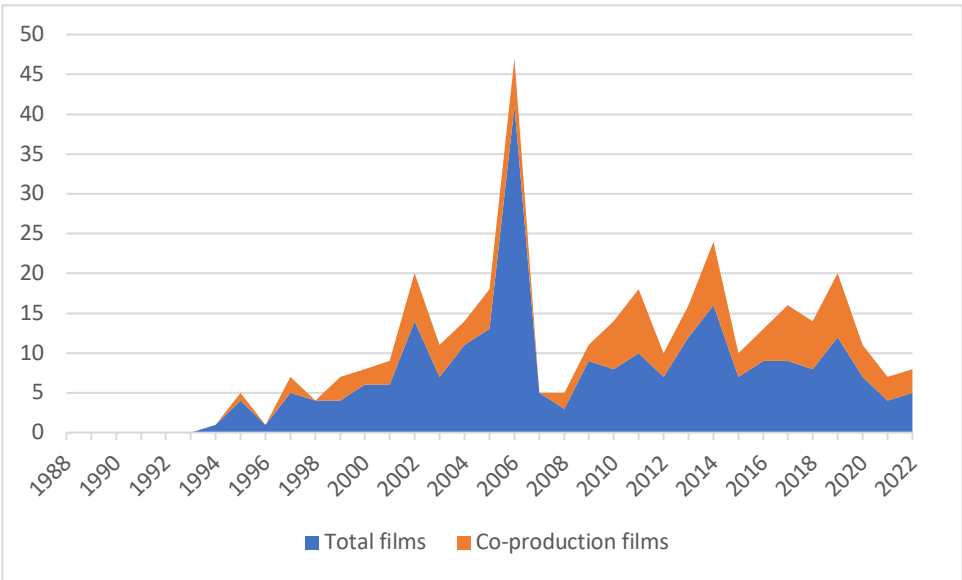
The sales/festivals/markets phase involves licensing the film to distributors in different territories. It is important to highlight, as one of the arguments of this thesis, that festivals such as IFFR, due to their history,

robustness, and economic impact, have the potential to influence the film industry at different stages of the value chain. In this particular stage, film festivals play a crucial role in presenting films to broader audiences and attracting industry professionals, thereby becoming industry hubs for a few days. IFFR has screened 248 Mexican films and hosted 660 Mexican professionals in industry activities. Twenty-two Mexican films have participated in CineMart, with one receiving a Tiger Award. These activities facilitate networking and potential sales to international distributors.

Distribution:

The distribution phase prepares the film for public viewing in its domestic market and, potentially, internationally, involving negotiations with distributors, different screening platforms, and marketing strategies. With 248 films screened and 22 films participating in CineMart, IFFR has contributed to the distribution strategies of independent Mexican films seeking to access particularly the European film market. Out of the 248 films screened at IFFR, 106 were co-productions, and scheme that in the last couple of decades has become more and more popular, as it can be seen in figure 10.

Figure 10. *Number of Mexican films screened at IFFR per edition, differentiating between total films and co-produced films, 1988 - 2022*



Source: Own elaboration with information from IFFR Database, "Films screened IFFR – Mexico 1988 - 2022" accessed through International Film Festival Rotterdam internal database, May, 2024.

It is also interesting to point out that before 1994, only two Mexican films were screened at IFFR, in 1972 and 1986. The spike in 2006 is notable as it coincides with IFFR organizing a section called “Hotspots,” aimed at linking cinema as an art form to its place of origin. In 2006, Mexico City was chosen as a hotspot, significantly increasing the exposure of Mexican cinema on the international stage.

Exploitation:

Finally, the exploitation phase involves strategically presenting the film across various platforms, capitalizing on multiple revenue streams beyond its primary release. According to Angus Finney, this includes spin-off products such as toys, computer games, books, soundtracks, etc. The potential of independent films in this last phase is minimal compare to blockbusters. However, they might still get revenue through later distribution on streaming platforms, future film retrospectives, or merchandise if they become cult films. In this sense, by screening 248 Mexican IFFR has contributed in the visibility and potential exploitation of Mexican cinema, and through “hotspots”, the year 2006 served as a valuable platform to showcase more than 40 films of the new generation of Mexican filmmakers.

Through the analysis of the collaboration between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry within the framework of the independent film value chain model, it is shown that the relationship between the two has been rich and dynamic. IFFR has been present in all seven stages of the independent film value chain, playing particularly crucial roles at different stages as the Mexican film industry evolved. For instance, during the 1990s, IFFR, and particularly the HBF, the first cinema fund in the world, were fundamental in keeping the voices of Mexican creators alive. At a time when the industry was essentially dismantled and lacked support mechanisms, having direct financial support and moral backing was critical for filmmakers. In recent decades, however, the support provided through IFFR Pro has been especially valuable, allowing Mexican film projects to access co-production schemes during the production stage, and facilitating potential distribution, particularly in the European market. Furthermore, as Mexican cinema has struggled to connect with its domestic audience, being able to screen and promote films abroad enhances international recognition and improves reception at home. There is a famous saying in Mexico that films need to triumph abroad before being welcomed at home. Additionally, it is important to mention that the HBF still remains important ally for Mexican authors with more experimental films that would otherwise struggle to get financiers in Mexico.

On the other hand, the Mexican films supported by IFFR through the HBF and CineMart have simultaneously contributed to the prestige and positive image of the HBF and IFFR as a whole. The 52 Mexican films backed by HBF have collectively garnered 210 awards and 237 nominations, both internationally and in Mexico, some at festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin, and Sundance, as shown in Table 3. Additionally, the films backed by IFFR in CineMart have accumulated 77 national and international awards and 127 nominations, as shown in Table 4.

Table 3. *Total of Mexican films supported by the HBF 1988 – 2022, international and national awards and nominations received by film*

	Year	Film	Director	Type of Support ⁶⁰	Awards	Nominations
1	1989	Lola	María Novaro and Beatriz Novaro	SPD	6	2
2	1996	Who the Hell Is Juliette?	Carlos Marcovich	PPS	10	7
3	1997	En el país de no pasa nada	Maria Del Carmen De Lara	SPD	3	1
4	1997	Fibra óptica	Francisco Athié	PPS	2	5
5	1997	Sin Dejar Huella	María Novaro	SPD	5	4
6	1998	American Visa	Juan Carlos Valdivia	SPD	3	5
7	1998	Demasiado amor	Ernesto Rimoch	SPD	1	6
8	1999	De la calle	Gerardo Tort	SPD	22	17
9	1999	Perfume de Gardenias (Perfume de Violetas)	Marisa Sistach	SPD	17	16
10	1999	Un banquete en Tetlapayac	Olivier Debroise	PPS		
11	2001	Crónicas	Sebastián Cordero	SPD	9	9
12	2001	Japón	Carlos Reygadas	PPS	16	10
13	2001	La sangre iluminada	Ivan Ávila Dueñas	SPD		
14	2001	Time of Impunity	Alejandra Islas	SPD	No release	
15	2002	No Monkeys in Bed!	Valentina Leduc Navarro	SPD	No release	
16	2003	Sobre mi sangre	Miguel Calderón	SPD	No release	

⁶⁰ SPD: Script and Project Development; PS: Production Support; PPS: Post-production Support.

17	2003	Tatuaramba	Paul Leduc	SPD	No release	
18	2004	Los Ladrones Viejos. Leyendas del artegio	Everardo González Reyes	SPD	5	2
19	2004	Sangre	Amat Escalante	SPD	4	6
20	2004	Y he aquí volvi el rostro al cielo y me di cuenta de injusticias que hay bajo su cape	Julian Hernandez	SPD	No release	
21	2005	Batalla en el cielo	Carlos Reygadas	PPS	1	3
22	2005	Sangre	Amat Escalante	PPS	4	6
23	2006	A Mexican Story	Artur Aristakisian	SPD	No release yet	
24	2006	Familia Tortuga	Ruben Imaz	SPD	5	4
25	2007	Ceased	Daniela Schneider	SPD		
26	2007	Friccion	Michel Lipkes	SPD	No release	
27	2007	Los herederos	Eugenio Polgovsky	PS	5	7
28	2008	It's My Pleasure	Elisa Miller	SPD		1
29	2008	La castración	Ivan Lowenberg	SPD	4	9
30	2008	Los últimos cristeros	Matías Meyer	SPD		9
31	2008	Sor Juana's Dream	Gregorio Rocha	SPD	No release	
32	2009	Lobo en medio de lobos	Natalia López	SPD	No release	
33	2009	Vaho	Alejandro Gerber Bicecci	PPS	1	2
34	2009	Verano de Goliat	Nicolás Pereda	PS	4	2
35	2009	Los últimos cristeros	Matías Meyer	NFF + HBF		9*
36	2010	Las voces (en la estancia)	Carlos Armella	PS	3	
37	2010	Mai morire	Enrique Rivero	SPD	2	2
38	2010	Paraísos artificiales	Yulene Olaizola	PPS	1	3
39	2010	Tormentero	Ruben Imaz	SPD	5	
40	2010	Tree Shade	Pedro González-Rubio	SPD	No release	
41	2011	Greatest Hits	Nicolás Pereda	PS	2	2
42	2012	Extraño pero verdadero	Michel Lipkes	SPD	4	4

43	2012	Halley	Sebastián Hofmann	PPS	9	6
44	2012	Penumbra	Eduardo Villanueva	PPS	1	2
45	2013	Yo	Matías Meyer	SPD	4	2
46	2014	Tiempo compartido	Sebastián Hofmann	SPD	4	13
47	2015	Antigone	Pedro González-Rubio	SPD		2
48	2016	Fireflies	Bani Khoshnoudi	NFF + Europe	5	4
49	2017	Hymns	Babak Jalali	SPD / NFF + HBF	No release yet	
50	2017	Sleepwalk	Ricardo Silva	SPD	No release yet	
51	2018	Noche de fuego	Tatiana Huezo	NFF + Europe	23	35
52	2020	Totem	Lila Avilés	NFF + Europe	20	29
			TOTAL		210	237

Source: Own elaboration with data from Internet Movie Data Base (IMdB), accessed May 2024:

<https://www.imdb.com/>

Table 4. *Total of Mexican films participants in CineMart 1995 – 2022, international and national awards and nominations received by film*

	Year	Film ⁶¹	Director	Countries of production	Awards	Nominations
1	1997	Fibra óptica	Francisco Athié	Mexico	2	5
2	1999	Demasiado amor	Ernesto Rimoch	Mexico, Spain	1	6
3	1999	La fiebre del loco*	Andrés Wood	Chile, Spain, Mexico	5	8
4	2002	El cobrador	Paul Leduc	Mexico	3	10
5	2003	Crónicas*	Sebastián Cordero	Mexico, Ecuador	9	9
6	2005	Sangre	Amat Escalante	Mexico, France	4	6
7	2006	A Mexican Story	Artur Aristakisian	Mexico, Russia	No release yet	
8	2006	Los bastardos	Amat Escalante	Mexico	6	6
9	2007	Il futuro*	Alicia Scherson	Chile, Mexico	3	4
10	2008	Friccion	Michel Lipkes	Mexico	No release	
11	2008	Las oscuras primaveras	Ernesto Contreras	Mexico	5	11

⁶¹ Films with an asterisk are those in which Mexico is not the primary producer.

12				United Kingdom, Mexico	No release	
	2010	Another World	Alexis Dos Santos			
13	2010	Heli	Amat Escalante	Mexico	16	28
14	2011	Post tenebras lux	Carlos Reygadas	Mexico, France	6	7
15	2011	Tree Shade	Pedro González-Rubio	Mexico	No release	
16				Dominican Republic, Mexico, France	8	10
	2012	Dólares de Arena*	Laura Amelia Guzmán, Israel Cárdenas Ramírez			
17	2013	Extraño pero verdadero	Michel Lipkes	Mexico, France	4	4
18	2014	Tiempo compartido	Sebastián Hofmann	Mexico	4	12
19	2018	Sleepwalk	Ricardo Silva / Spécola	Mexico, United States	revisar	
20	2020	Floating with Spirits	Juanita Onzaga	Belgium, Mexico	1	1
21	2021	The Ivy	Ana Cristina Barragan	Ecuador, Mexico	revisar	
22	2022	Solo tengo sed	Matthew Porterfield	Mexico	No release yet	
			TOTAL		77	127

Source: Own elaboration with data from Internet Movie Data Base (IMdB), accessed May 2024:

<https://www.imdb.com/>

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has briefly traced the evolution of the Mexican film industry from its beginnings, highlighting the significant ups and downs that have shaped it over time. Despite experiencing periods of decline, including two decades that could be described as disgraceful for national film culture, Mexico continued to cultivate a unique film identity led by talented directors.

The collaboration between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry has been rich and dynamic, with IFFR significantly contributing to Mexican projects at all stages of the independent film value chain. During the 1990s, IFFR, particularly through the HBF, played a crucial role in supporting Mexican filmmakers financially and morally when the industry lacked local support mechanisms. In recent decades, IFFR has continued to support bold and risky projects through IFFR Pro, facilitating co-production schemes and distribution opportunities, particularly in the European market. This international exposure has also helped Mexican cinema gain recognition both abroad and at home, where it often struggles to connect with domestic audiences.

It is also important to note that in recent times, the HBF remains significant for Mexican filmmakers, especially the ones creating more experimental or unconventional films that would otherwise struggle to

secure financing through the various schemes in Mexico. Additionally, Mexican films have greatly contributed to the prestige of the HBF and IFFR as a whole, being showcased at some of the most prestigious film festivals and receiving numerous awards and nominations after the backing from IFFR. A collaboration that could be defined as symbiotic, “a mutually beneficial relationship between different people or groups”.⁶²

⁶² Definition of the word “symbiotic” as shown in Google by the Oxford Dictionary of Languages



Film still *Sangre* (2005) by Amat Escalante

CHAPTER V - Exploring Trajectories: IFFR Effect on Mexican Independent Films and Filmmakers

In this final chapter, the goal is to enrich the research with a human perspective, exploring how the collaboration with IFFR and the HBF may have benefited the filmmakers' projects and their professional development as filmmakers. This analysis is based on two semi-structured interviews: the first conducted on April 25, 2024, with María Novaro, filmmaker and current Director of the Mexican Institute of Cinematography; the second, with filmmaker Amat Escalante on May 23, 2024. These discussions centred on two main research lines: firstly, assessing the influence of IFFR and HBF on the subsequent trajectory of the supported films, including how IFFR contributed to the development of the films at various stages of the independent film value chain; and secondly, evaluating the impact of IFFR on the career development of the filmmakers and the potential implications in their creative processes. Answering the particular question, how has the collaboration between the Mexican filmmakers and IFFR impacted the trajectories of their films, shaped their careers, and influence their creative process?

5.1 The *Apapacho* from the Hubert Bals Fund: María Novaro

María Novaro, a renowned figure in the landscape of Mexican cinema, started her filmmaking career in the 1980s after studying film in Mexico City. As early as 1986 she won the Ariel Award, which recognizes excellence in Mexican cinema and is presented by the Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences (AMACC), for Best Short Fiction Film with *Una Isla Rodeada de Agua*.⁶³

Her first feature film, *Lola*, was also the first Latin American film supported by the Hubert Bals Fund in 1988 for script and project development. Later on, *Lola* garnered the Ariel Award for Best First Work and Best Original Screenplay in 1990, an honour she shared with her sister and screenplay writer Beatriz Novaro, and was part of the Forum of New Cinema of Berlinale. In 1997, almost ten years after *Lola*, her film *Sin Dejar Huella*, was also awarded the Hubert Bals Fund for script and project development support. The film, was co-produced with Spain and won the Critics Award and Best Latin American Film at the Sundance Film Festival.

In 2006, she founded Axolote Cine with some of her university students, producing films like Matías Meyer's *Los Últimos Cristeros*, which was later on also supported by the HBF in 2009. Novaro's films often explore the contemporary female condition in Mexico and the emotional survival struggles of women. Her filmmaking trajectory is among the most prolific in Mexico, and has been presented and recognized in important international festivals such as Berlin, Venice and Cannes. In 2018, she assumed the leadership of the Mexican Film Institute.

⁶³ Diccionario de Directores del Cine Mexicano, "María Luisa Novaro Peñaloza," accessed May 27, 2024, <https://diccionariodedirectoresdelcinemexicano.com/directores-cine-mex/novaro-penalaza-maria-luisa/>.

Image 1. *María Novaro in 2023*



Source: Wikimedia Commons, accessed June 21, 2024

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Mar%C3%ADa_Novaro#/media/File:Mar%C3%ADa_Novaro,_2023.jpg

When asked what did it mean for her being beneficiary of a film fund in Europe, especially taking into account how difficult it was to make cinema in Mexico, even more particularly as a woman, María Novaro explained how crucial the support from the Hubert Bals Fund had been in her career. She highlights the Fund's role in enabling her to produce her films during a time when there were no other viable funding mechanisms in Mexico. This support not only facilitated the actual production but also helped her to gain

confidence in her own project, and to reaffirm that it was an important project worth making. In her own words:

Hubert Bals was not only a resource that really got the production of the film off the ground to see that it was possible to make the film, but it was also like an injection of strength for my self-esteem, to affirm my ideas, to say this project is indeed interesting.⁶⁴

Furthermore, when asked how IFFR or the HBF contributed to the different stages of film production, she detailed that the first time she got the HBF with *Lola* she did not really utilize the potential for networking and market access provided by IFFR, highlighting her and the producer's inexperience at that moment in terms of the benefits of participating in the festival, *Lola* was benefited in the second edition of the HBF, however, ten years later with *Sin Dejar Huella*, the story was different:

Yes, with *Sin Dejar Huella* it became clear to me that the support [the HBF] was a mark of trust, a mark of quality; it meant being noticed. I didn't fully understand it when it happened with *Lola*; I appreciated it, but didn't completely grasp it. However, with *Sin Dejar Huella*, and after everything I had seen from Hubert Bals, I realized its significance. I believe I once applied for another project which didn't receive support, but I was already aware of the many values and the tremendous empowerment that the Hubert Bals mark contributes to a project. I fully understood this later on.⁶⁵

Later on, Novaro's explained about the HBF facilitating critical support in two key moments of her career when she felt rock bottom. Despite her previous success with *Danzón* (1991), which had garnered international recognition and various awards, Novaro faced considerable obstacles in securing funding for *Sin Dejar Huella* within Mexico. The year 1997 marked the worst period in Mexican cinema, in that time she had to shelve three to four projects due to lack of financial backing. Receiving support from HBF during this period was not merely financial but also served as a crucial catalyst in Novaro's career, to regain confidence in her own projects and capabilities.

It was another morale boost at another critical moment, because if I remember and think about it, after the success I had with *Danzón*, I should have had more opportunities and facilities. But no, I did not have

⁶⁴ María Novaro (IMCINE director, and filmmaker), interview by Elizabeth Prado, 25 April 2024. Original quote in Spanish: Hubert Bals no solo significó un recurso para echar a andar realmente la producción de la película para ver que sí era posible hacer la película sino que fue como una sí como una inyección de fortalecer la autoestima de afianzar mis ideas de decir este proyecto sí resulta interesante.

⁶⁵ Novaro, interview. Original quote in Spanish: Sí, con *Sin Dejar Huella* me quedó claro que el apoyo [el HBF] era un sello de confianza, un sello de calidad; te ponen atención. No lo entendí completamente cuando sucedió con *Lola*; lo agradecí, pero no lo comprendí en su totalidad. Sin embargo, con *Sin Dejar Huella*, y después de todo lo que había visto hacer al Hubert Bals, me di cuenta de su importancia. Creo que en algún momento apliqué con otro proyecto que no recibió apoyo, pero ya era consciente de los muchos valores y el enorme fortalecimiento que el sello del Hubert Bals aporta a un proyecto.

them; the world had completely closed off to me. So yes, once again, the Hubert Bals was an injection of confidence and optimism, prompting me to say, 'Let's go, I am going to write this.'⁶⁶

Finally in the conversation, she discussed the on-going debate in regards to the current international film funding schemes that have been criticized for exercising neocolonial power-relations that may influence the narratives and aesthetics of films produce in the so-called global south. When questioned about her own experience as a beneficiary Novaro mentioned:

[I felt] With complete and absolute freedom. So no, zero, not even in an unconscious way because that happens, yes, I have seen it and I have seen it with students and I have seen it in projects I advise that suddenly change to please the Europeans or hoping that a European festival will take it and something starts happening that shouldn't happen in the content or form of the films we propose from Latin America.⁶⁷

Two of Novaro's films, supported by HBF, received substantial national and international recognition. *Lola* collected multiple awards, including Best First Feature Film at the Havana Film Festival, the OCIC Award in Berlin, and four Ariel Awards in Mexico for Best Script, Best First Feature, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Supporting Actress. *Sin Dejar Huella* also achieved significant recognition, winning Best Latin American Film at the Sundance Film Festival, the Audience Award at the Guadalajara International Film Festival, and two Ariel Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Special Effects. Additionally, it received five Ariel nominations and was nominated for the Golden Seashell at the San Sebastián Film Festival.

At the end, Maria described the HBF in three Spanish words: “*Luminoso, incluyente, como un apapacho*”, the first two meaning luminous and inclusive, the last one however, is a Mexican word difficult to translate. It is used to describe the feeling of a warm, and comforting hug, an unmistakable sense of caring and affectionate support.

⁶⁶ Novaro, interview. Original quote in Spanish: Fue otra inyección de moral en otro momento clave, porque si recuerdo y pienso, bueno, tras el éxito que tuve con *Danzón*, debería haber tenido más oportunidades y facilidades. Pero no, no las tenía, el mundo se me había cerrado completamente. Así que sí, una vez más, el Hubert Bals fue una inyección de confianza y de optimismo, que me impulsó a decir: 'Vamos, voy a escribir esto.

⁶⁷ Novaro, interview. Original quote in Spanish: [Me sentí] Con completa y absoluta libertad. Entonces no, cero, no vaya ni siquiera de una manera no consciente porque eso llega a pasar sí lo he visto y lo he visto con alumnos y lo he visto en proyectos que asesoro que de repente se trastocan por querer agradar al europeo o porque ojalá sí lo tome un festival europeo y empieza a suceder algo que no debería suceder en el contenido o en la forma de las películas que proponemos desde Latinoamérica.

Image 2. *Lola's* (1989) promotional poster

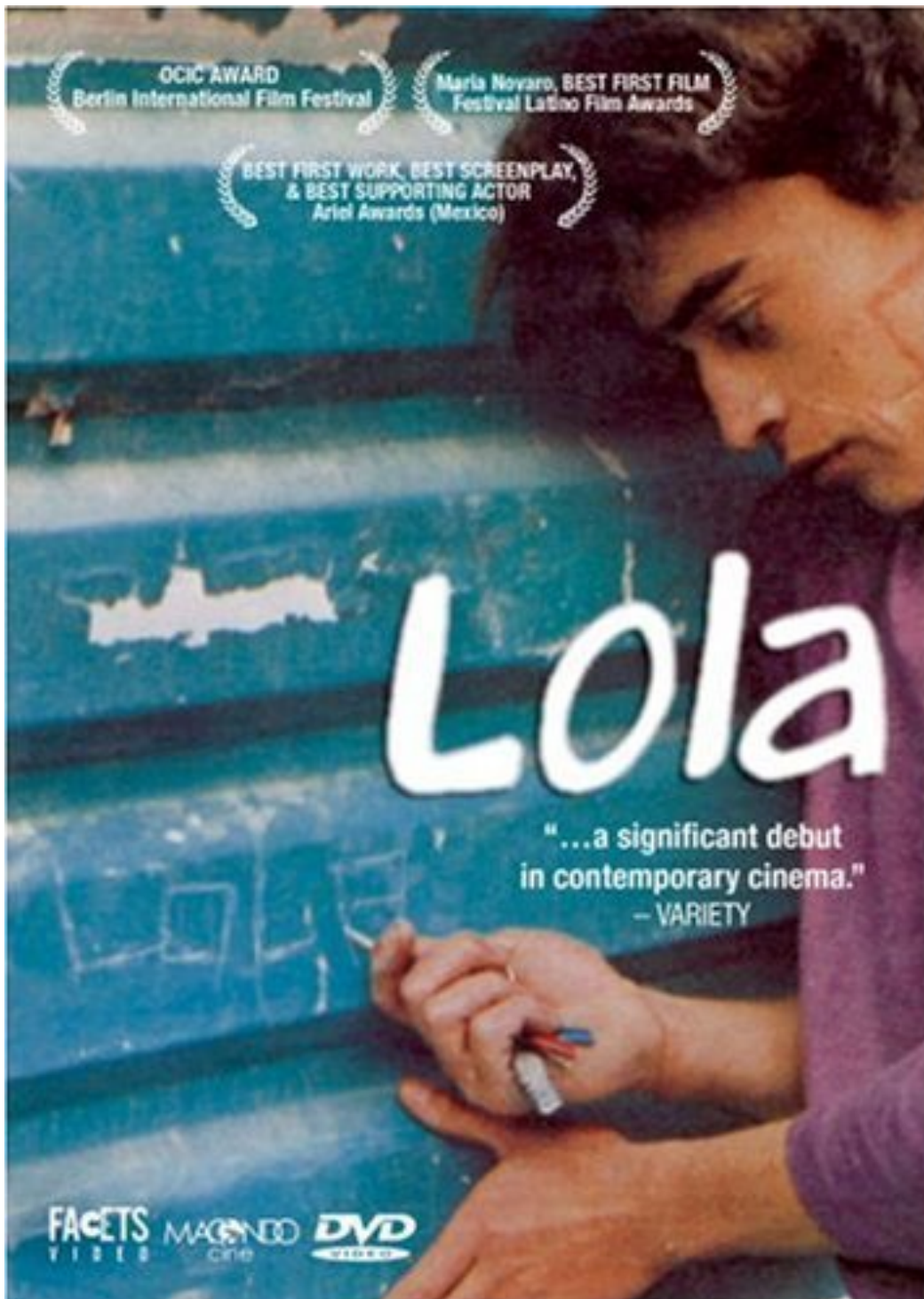


Image 3. *Sin Dejar Huella's* (2000) promotional poster



5.2 A long and prolific relationship: Amat Escalante

From the early days of his career, renowned Mexican director Amat Escalante has been a prominent presence at IFFR. From 2002 until 2024, he has actively participated at IFFR in eight different occasions, he has been part of CineMart with three different films in the years 2005, 2003, and 2010, has screened six films at the festival, and was benefited from the Hubert Bals Fund for his opera prima *Sangre* in 2004 and 2005.⁶⁸ The film obtained funding for script and project development, production, and distribution. The film later on got his world premiere at the Cannes, and was nominated in the section *Un certain Regard*.

Among other notable Escalante's films, are *Heli* (2013), a co-production with Germany, France, and the Netherlands, was part of CineMart, and earned the director 28 nominations and 16 awards, including Best Director at Cannes. Additionally, *La región salvaje* (2016), was nominated for 20 awards and won seven of them, including the Silver Lion for Best Director at Venice.

Escalante's films are characterized by its exploration of unavoidably derailed situations, internalized violence, and wicked sexuality. His films, often co-productions with European countries –the Netherlands among them–, navigate the complex terrains of violence, machismo, corruption, inequality, and societal vulnerabilities within contemporary Mexican society.

Image 4. *Portrait of Amat Escalante in 2023*



Source: IFFR internal data base, "Director profile"

⁶⁸ IFFR Database, "Director Profile," accessed May 23, 2024, IFFR internal database.

At the very beginning of our conversation, Escalante highlighted how IFFR has profoundly shaped his approach to filmmaking; since his early career, after getting his first rejection for his first short film *Amarrados* in the local film festival from his hometown, Guanajuato, at age 21, when he was unsure about becoming a professional filmmaker:

At that time, it was very important for me; I was 21 and unsure if I could dedicate myself to filmmaking. [...] receiving the news that I was selected for Rotterdam was very good, especially after that previous rejection, but it also motivated me greatly to think that I was on the right path and that someone appreciated and connected with what I was doing. Thus, the Rotterdam festival was extremely important to me, and I still remember receiving that news; it was one of the best pieces of news I've received in my life to this day, a feeling I still remember, because it was indeed very significant.⁶⁹

The time when Escalante started making films was still a time of crises for Mexican Cinema, in 2002 when he premiered his first short in IFFR only 14 were produced in Mexico. There were no financial instruments that promoted the creation of Mexican Cinema, in this scenario having access to international support was fundamental:

IFFR supported me in my early days, which is something not everyone or every institution can do. Here in Mexico, not only with the local festival in my city but also with government support, if you haven't done anything yet, you don't get any help [...] Now more than 200 films are made per year, through Eficine and other incentives and platforms and all that. But when I started, it was around 25, 30 in a good year. So that has changed very radically in Mexico as well. And the support from the festival was even more important back then [...] Previously, almost all Mexican films could apply to the Hubert Bals Fund. Now, most films can't even apply because their budgets are too high. But for someone to start a film that maybe, I mean, without money, with very little money, and with a very personal vision, difficult to convince financiers and companies that support cinema, there, the Hubert Bals Fund is still very important.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Amat Escalante (filmmaker), interview by Elizabeth Prado, 23 May 2024. Original quote in Spanish: En ese momento sí fue muy importante para mí, yo tenía 21 años y estaba no seguro de que iba a poder dedicarme a hacer cine. [...] recibir la noticia de que estaba seleccionado en Rotterdam fue muy bueno también por ese rechazo anterior, pero pues también me motivó mucho a pensar que iba en buen camino y que alguien apreciaba y conectó con lo que yo estaba haciendo. Entonces fue sumamente importante el festival de Rotterdam, y aún recuerdo haber recibido la noticia, fue de las mejores noticias que he recibido en mi vida hasta ahora, el sentimiento que aún recuerdo, porque sí era muy significativo.

⁷⁰ Escalante, interview. Original quote in Spanish: Soy muy leal al festival, porque han sido muy importantes para mí a través del festival en sí, mostrando mi primer corto y mostrando todas mis películas, pero además apoyándome en mis inicios, que eso pues es muy importante, algo que no cualquier persona o institución puede hacer. Yo aquí en México, no sólo con el festival local de mi ciudad, sino también con los apoyos gubernamentales, pues si no has hecho nada, no te da nada [...] Ahora se hacen más de 200

Furthermore, the festival's contribution to his opera prima, *Sangre*, which benefited greatly from IFFR at different stages of production, underscored the festival's role in advancing his early career. These funds not only eased the financial strains of filmmaking but more significantly, provided Escalante strategic opportunities to show his work at one of the most prominent venues for independent film and establish connections with influential industry gatekeepers. In the film market, CineMart, he was able to make important connections that collaborated for the post-production of the film, for instance he was invited to participate in Film in Construction in the Toulouse film festival, as well as to cause an impression to eventually be selected for Cannes.

I received not only financial support but also strong moral backing, an impulse that made me feel that someone believed in the value of what I was doing. This was not just about funding; it was also a crucial motivation to keep going. This was the case with *Sangre*, where I received support from the script development stage through to production or post-production, I cannot clearly remember, and then even with distribution. The Hubert Bals Fund supported *Sangre* at all stages, and although it didn't guarantee, it greatly facilitated the possibility of having a world premiere at the Rotterdam Film Festival—a very prestigious event with a specific vision of cinema—which was extremely important to me. This was a significant boost for *Sangre*, which ultimately was selected for its world premiere at Cannes.⁷¹

Now, even with a well-established career, he emphasizes the continuing importance of European funds for bold Mexican films that explore unpopular or challenging themes, such as his. For these films, which often struggle to secure local funding, access to international funds and the ability to secure partners abroad remain fundamental. Even when their overall impact has diminished from the 1990s to the present.

For Mexico in particular, I believe it has become much less important, there are many films that manage to exist without European co-productions. However, for me, it has been crucial due to the

películas al año, a través del Eficine y otros incentivos y las plataformas y todo eso. Pero cuando yo empecé, pues era alrededor de 25, 30 en un buen año. Entonces sí ha cambiado muy radicalmente eso en México también. Y era aún más importante ese apoyo del festival [...] Antes casi todas las películas mexicanas podrían aplicar al Hubert Bals. Ahora la mayoría de películas ni siquiera podrían aplicar por sus presupuestos más altos que tienen, yo creo. Pero para que alguien pueda empezar una película que tal vez, o sea, sin dinero, con muy poco dinero, y que sea una visión muy personal, difícil de convencer a financieros y a empresas que dan el apoyo de cine, ahí pues sí es muy importante todavía el Hubert Bals.

⁷¹ Escalante, interview. Original quote in Spanish: No solo recibí un apoyo económico, sino también un fuerte respaldo moral, un impulso que me hizo sentir que alguien creía en el valor de lo que estaba haciendo. Esto no se trataba solo de financiación; era también una motivación crucial para continuar. Así fue con *Sangre*, donde recibí apoyo desde el desarrollo del guion hasta la producción o postproducción, no recuerdo bien, e incluso también para la distribución. El Hubert Bals Fund respaldó *Sangre* en todas sus etapas y, aunque no garantizaba, sí facilitaba enormemente la posibilidad de tener un estreno mundial en el Festival de Rotterdam —un evento tan prestigioso y con una visión tan específica del cine— lo cual era sumamente importante para mí. Esto fue un gran impulso para *Sangre*, que finalmente fue seleccionada para su estreno mundial en Cannes.

type of cinema I create, which is not easily financed by companies through Eficine. My films, which are risky, ambiguous, a bit different, odd, sometimes unpleasant, and deal with less appealing themes, heavily rely on this type of funding. Half of my budgets come from Europe, from countries like the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Denmark, which has been essential for the type of cinema I make, and that is not very common in Mexico.⁷²

When asked about the controversy surrounding pornmiseria, a term used over the last decade to criticize films funded by European festivals that depict extreme poverty and stereotypes that, according to critics, perpetuate preconceived notions held by European audiences about certain countries, Escalante emphasized the importance of artistic freedom, advocating for creators to express genuine themes without restraint, regardless of potential criticism:

Certain dramatic events and conflicts are very specific to each country and outrage many artists and creative individuals who have the power to speak and create. Sometimes it's difficult not to discuss or show certain things because someone might label it as 'pornmiseria' [...] I have always tried to do what I feel, what inspires me, and just that, what I truly feel regardless of what anyone else says. [...] The idea that is it offensive to show [in a film] to Europeans something ugly from a country is more a reflection of that country's insecurity and its tourism promoters [...] It would be very sad not being able to express oneself. It's complicated because for them [Europeans], [these realities] seem distant, and [the problem is] when [the film] is not of quality or is not original, and just want to impress [...] I live in Mexico and am greatly affected by all the injustices and frustrations, all the inequality I see, and there's no way I could not talk about it just to avoid offending people in Mexico because it was seen in Europe [...] It was even suggested in a financial newspaper that my screenwriter and I should be electrocuted like 100 years ago [...] for supposedly defaming our country through our film *Heli*.⁷³

⁷² Escalante, interview. Original quote in Spanish: Para México en particular, creo que se ha vuelto mucho menos importante para muchas películas que logran existir sin las coproducciones europeas. Sin embargo, para mí ha sido crucial debido al tipo de cine que realizo, el cual no es fácil de financiar con empresas a través de Eficine. Mis películas, que toman riesgos, son ambiguas, un poco diferentes, raras, a veces desagradables y abordan temas no tan atractivos, dependen mucho de este tipo de financiamiento. La mitad de mis presupuestos provienen de Europa, de países como Holanda, Francia, Alemania y Dinamarca, lo que ha sido fundamental para el tipo de cine que hago, que ya no es muy común en México.

⁷³ Escalante, interview. Original quote in Spanish: ciertas cosas dramáticas, conflictos, contrastes dramáticos que son muy particulares de cada país y que indignan a muchos artistas y a muchas personas creativas que pues tienen el poder de hablar y de crear algo y a veces es difícil no hablar de ciertas cosas o no mostrar algo porque alguien va a decir que es porno miseria [...] yo siempre he intentado hacer lo que yo siento, lo que me inspire y ya, lo que yo siento verdadero sin importar que alguien diga lo que diga [...] pero la idea de que sea ofensivo mostrar a los europeos algo que es feo de otro país pues es más bien una inseguridad del país y de los promotores turísticos de ese país[...] Sería muy triste no hablar, no sé, es complicado porque también claro para ellos lo ven lejano y a veces se puede cegar un poco algo que tal vez no está siendo tan original o que está un poco superficial. Entonces ahí sí sería pues algo que no es de calidad o algo que molesta cuando hay las cosas que son no originales, superficiales y que solo tratan de impresionar al público [...] vivo en México y me impacta mucho todas las cosas que veo de injusticia y de frustraciones, de desigualdad y pues ni modo de no hablar de eso para que no se vayan a ofender en México porque eso se vio en Europa. A mí

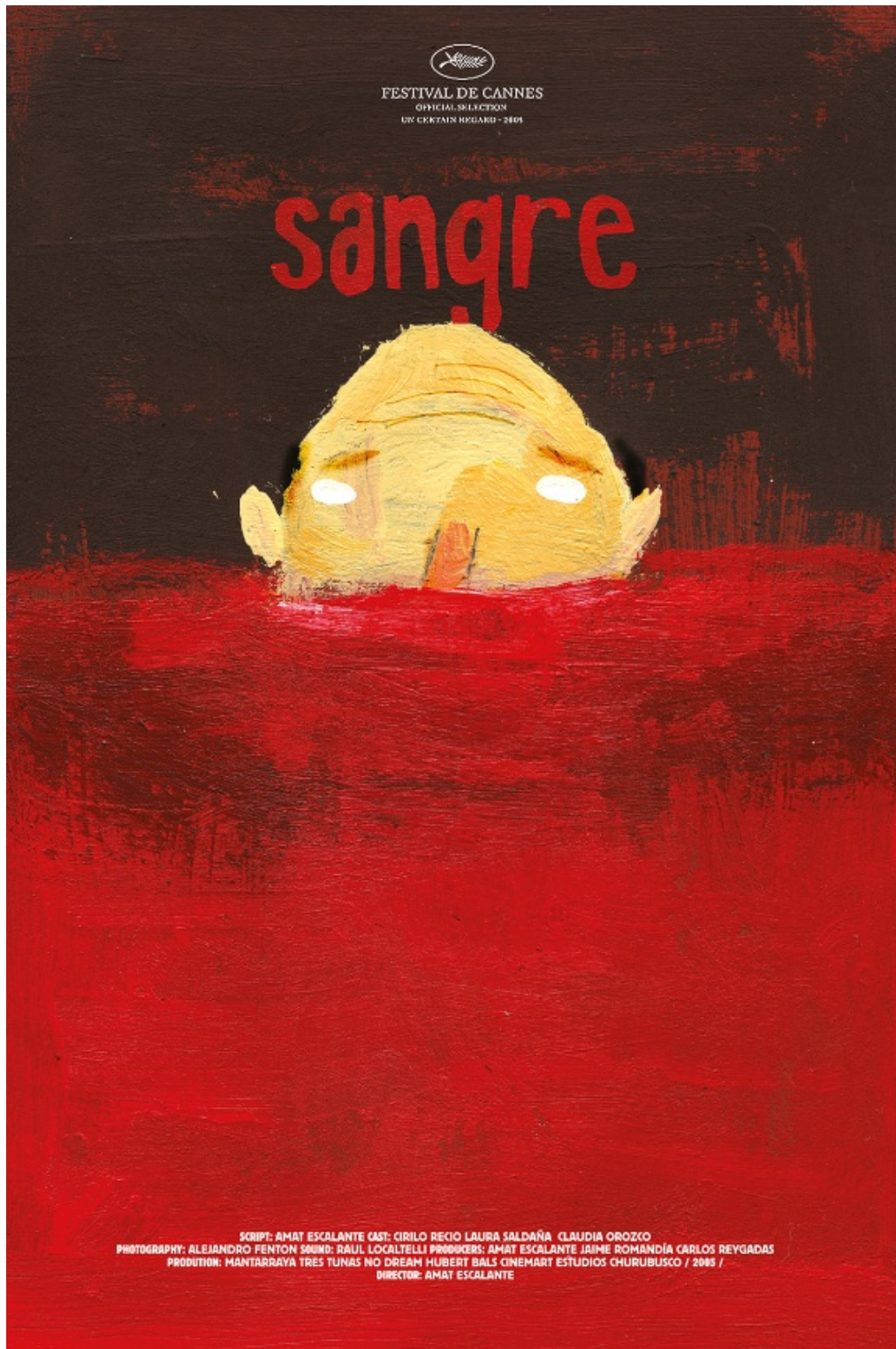
As our interview drew to a close, we talked about the special relation Escalante has with IFFR and with the city of Rotterdam itself. He explained what has drawn him back year after year, discussing not only the professional ties but also the deep personal and emotional bonds he has formed through the festival that now make Rotterdam feel like home:

I've had so many experiences there, not just professional but also personal and emotional, all emerging from the festival which is so intense and significant to me. The people who work at the festival, some are no longer there, but they are people that I met at IFFR who have been very special to me both personally and professionally. And then there's the feeling that they believe in what I've been doing since the very beginning; yes, as Sally Field said upon receiving her Oscar: "You like me, you really like me".⁷⁴

ya me pasó con *Heli* que salió un artículo en no sé qué periódico financiero que decía que a mí y a mi guionista nos deberían de electrocutar como hace 100 años [...] por supuestamente difamar al país.

⁷⁴ Escalante, interview. Original quote in Spanish: Pues muchas experiencias que he tenido ahí, no solo profesionales pero también personales, emocionales que he tenido, que han surgido de ese festival también por ser algo tan intenso, importante para mí, entonces bueno, toda la gente que trabaja en el festival que a través de los años que ya muchas no están ahí pero gente que he conocido ahí que han sido muy especiales para mí personalmente pero también profesionalmente y pues el sentimiento que creen en lo que estoy haciendo, ya son seis películas desde mi corto hasta mi último largo que están ahí entonces, pues como diría esta Sally Field recibiendo el Oscar confirma que me quieren, que realmente me quieren.

Image 5. *Sangre's* (2005) promotional poster



5.3 The question of *pornmisery*

Even though there is an overall positive image of the role that IFFR has played in relation to Mexican cinema, the controversial topic informally tagged as *pornmisery* remains a significant issue in academic debates regarding film festival dynamics. However, making a definitive judgment on this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis. A thorough analysis of this phenomenon would require exploring the themes, narratives, representations, and overall aesthetics of most Mexican films backed by IFFR. However, it is important to acknowledge it, as it is one of the main criticisms leveled at film funds and film festival dynamics. Critics argue that these platforms perpetuate representations of developing-world realities for international audiences.

In the cases of Maria Novaro and Amat Escalante, both directors had different perspectives on the issue. Maria Novaro acknowledged witnessing the phenomenon as a film professor, particularly with young filmmakers who attempt to modify their works to appeal to European tastes. However, she emphasized the complete freedom she experienced when developing her own projects with the support from the HBF, allowing her to create films with feminist narratives during a time when female voices were structurally silenced in Mexico. On the other hand, Amat Escalante acknowledged that his films have been accused in different occasions of being *pornmisery* but attributed this label to those with vested interests in maintaining a clean image of the country abroad. He argued that it is impossible for any Mexican, not just filmmakers, to ignore the severe socio-economic issues related to poverty, inequalities, corruption, and injustices prevalent in the country. Additionally, both authors highlighted the importance of artist being true to themselves, and propose what they think is their own vision of Mexican cinema, independent of what the critics would say, for the sake of the art not just to make an impression.

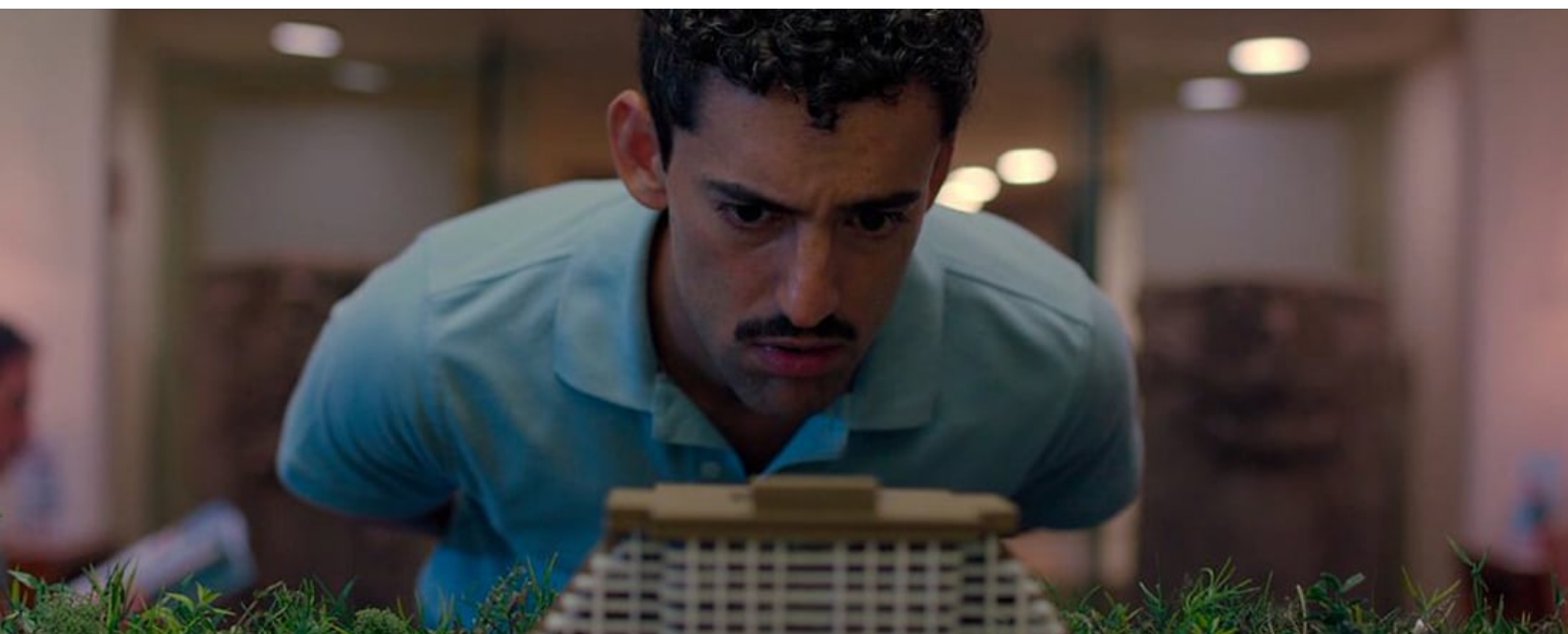
While it is true that such representations can contribute to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes towards particular countries or cultures, it is important to continue the debate about the ethics of showcasing these narratives and the responsibility of film festivals to break away from this cycle. Nevertheless, the collaboration of film festivals with creators from developing countries remains crucial to ensure the diversity of voices that might otherwise be silenced when there is no domestic film infrastructure, such as was the Mexican case particularly in the 1990s.

5.4 Conclusion

Both interviews were complementary, offering unique insights into different moments of the Mexican independent film industry, with both directors considered part of the New Mexican Cinema. Maria Novaro, a woman filmmaker working during the industry's most challenging decade, and Amat Escalante, a renowned director and frequent IFFR participant, provided valuable perspectives. Novaro highlighted the crucial role of HBF support, particularly from a gender discrimination standpoint, which, while beyond the scope of this thesis, underscores the broader impact of such film funds may have in promoting gender equality in filmmaking. At some point in the interview, she mentioned that in the Mexico of the 1990s, making a film about a single mother after the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City was defined as making a film about nothing by her colleagues in the industry.

Escalante's interview was enriching, as he has received support from IFFR for his projects at multiple stages of the independent film value chain. He also emphasized that participating in IFFR contributed greatly to his work being showcased on the highest platforms of cinema, such as Cannes and Venice. Despite not particularly needing IFFR's support to push his current projects forward, he continues to return to the festival regularly.

Both directors highlighted how the HBF (for Novaro) and IFFR (for Escalante) were crucial in deciding to continue their professional careers in filmmaking, providing the moral backing necessary to believe in their ideas, art, and overall, the value of what they understood as Mexican Cinema. In regards to *pornmisery*, both directors advocate for the integrity of Mexican cinema, stressing that filmmakers should remain true to their creative vision, even if criticized for it. Novaro criticized altering content to please European festivals, while Escalante emphasized the necessity of depicting genuine themes, regardless of accusations.



Film still *Tiempo Compartido* (2005) by Sebastián Hoffman

CHAPTER VI - Final Conclusions

Film, like all art forms, is inherently dynamic and ever-evolving. From the depiction of a train arrival at the end of the 19th century filmed in celluloid to today's complex narratives that immerse audiences in different worlds using cutting-edge virtual reality technology, cinema has continually transformed. This research has shown that the relationship between film festivals and the film industry mirrors this dynamism, even more if we take one particular film festival with a particular film industry for a long time period. Exploring the interaction between the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) and the Mexican independent film industry has revealed a continuously developing and symbiotic connection, reflecting the fluid nature of cinema itself.

This thesis begins with the premise that the dynamic relationship between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry has significantly contributed to the development of Mexican cinema from the establishment of the Hubert Bals Fund in 1988 until the 2022 edition. This research explored how IFFR, as a key player in promoting non-Western cinema, particularly from developing countries, has provided financial support, technical assistance, networking opportunities, exposure, and recognition to Mexican independent film projects. IFFR's support has been instrumental at different stages of the independent film value chain,

fostering the growth and evolution of Mexican cinema from idea and script development to final distribution and exhibition stages.

One of the main findings of this research is the critical role IFFR played for the Mexican film industry during the 1990s when it faced significant challenges and lacked local support mechanisms. Through its various programs, especially the HBF, IFFR played a crucial role in providing both financial and moral support to Mexican filmmakers. This support was essential in keeping the voices of independent creators alive during a period of crisis, as demonstrated in the interview with Maria Novaro. It also allowed the industry to flourish later on, with some of the most important voices of contemporary independent Mexican cinema, such as Amat Escalante, Carlos Reygadas, Lila Avilés, and Tatiana Huezo, collaborating with IFFR at different stages.

In recent decades, IFFR has become more significant to the Mexican independent film industry in other stages of the independent film value chain, supporting bold and risky projects through IFFR Pro, facilitating co-production schemes, and creating distribution opportunities, particularly in the European market. This international exposure has helped Mexican cinema gain recognition both abroad and at home, where it often struggles to connect with domestic audiences. The festival's emphasis on non-Western and triple-A cinema and its strategic positioning within the global film festival circuit have facilitated the exhibition of Mexican independent cinema, promoting it on an international stage. The interview with Amat Escalante is proof of this.

These findings are corroborated through quantitative analysis, providing a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between IFFR and the Mexican independent film industry. By examining numerical data from IFFR database, including the number of Mexican films supported by the Hubert Bals Fund, the frequency of Mexican filmmakers' participation in IFFR Pro, and the distribution and exhibition metrics of Mexican films at the festival, this study offers empirical evidence of the festival's impact. The quantitative data revealed significant trends and patterns, such as an increase in the number of supported Mexican films over the years as the industry grew stronger, with only nine films supported in the decade of the 1990s and almost 30 in the decade of the 2000s. These nine films in the 1990s, however, were highly representative of the total national production, with HBF financially supporting 3.5% of the entire decade's output, showing the key role the HBF played in a critical moment for the industry. The more recent importance of IFFR Pro is also shown in Figure 9, demonstrating the festival's role in enhancing the visibility of Mexican independent films in the international market, promoting co-production schemes, and facilitating exhibition, as illustrated in Figure 10. This empirical approach not only substantiated the qualitative findings but also highlighted the measurable relation of IFFR's with Mexican independent cinema.

Both interviews also provided valuable insights into the personal impact of IFFR's support on the filmmakers' careers. Novaro highlighted the crucial role of HBF support during a time when women faced discrimination in a male-dominated industry, emphasizing how funds like the HBF allowed her to develop feminist narratives at a time when such voices were structurally silenced. Future research could explore the relevance of film funds in promoting diversity in cinema from various theoretical perspectives. Novaro's interview underscored the potential for examining film funds from a feminist viewpoint, revealing how these funds can support gender equality in filmmaking. Further studies could investigate other dimensions of diversity, including ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic factors, and how film funds could further contribute to a more inclusive film industry.

Another important area for future research is the ongoing debate over whether funds or film festival should prioritize supporting quality or more interesting films coming from developing countries that already have a more or less established film industry, or stimulating filmmakers from the least developed countries. This remains a central consideration, especially given that funds like the HBF have been partially funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in their mission for world development aid. This also includes exploring the best schemes to develop collaboration while avoiding the perpetuation of power dynamics in the global-north benefactor/global-south beneficiary relationship.

However, even in developing countries with a more established film infrastructure, funds like the HBF remain crucial to support experimental films, young filmmakers, and those exploring controversial themes that may cause discomfort in particular sectors of the population. Escalante's case exemplifies this, as a frequent participant at IFFR, he emphasized how early support from the festival was fundamental in establishing his career and significantly contributed to showcasing his work on prestigious platforms such as Cannes and Venice. He and Novaro underscored how IFFR was crucial in their decision to continue with filmmaking, providing the moral backing necessary to believe in their ideas, art, and the value of what they understood as Mexican cinema.

Despite the overall positive image of IFFR's role in Mexican cinema, one of the main criticisms of the film festival support model has been the issue of *pornmisery*—the depiction of extreme poverty and stereotypes to appeal to European audiences. Both Novaro and Escalante advocate for the integrity of Mexican cinema, stressing that filmmakers should remain true to their creative vision, even if criticized for it. Novaro criticized the tendency to alter content to please European festivals particularly in young film students, while Escalante emphasized the necessity of depicting genuine themes, regardless of accusations, being himself already criticized. This debate highlights the ethical considerations of showcasing certain narratives and the responsibility of film festivals to avoid potentially perpetuating harmful representations if there is a lack of

diversity in their content from developing countries. This contentious topic will undoubtedly continue to inspire future research.

The main limitations faced by this research were primarily due to the lack of consistency in the database for the entire period studied (1988-2022). Changes in technology for record-keeping and data availability across different years and IFFR programs made it challenging to maintain a uniform dataset. Nevertheless, the information was very valuable and enough to provide a close-up view of the relationship between IFFR and the Mexican film industry. Another limitation is the different ways that national film agencies count their national production, which made it more complicated to set up Mexico in a regional comparative perspective. Lastly, using interviews as primary sources introduced a degree of subjectivity, as personal experiences and perspectives can vary widely and may not fully represent broader trends. Moreover, measuring the success of cultural and developmental contributions is inherently challenging. These are often indirect successes, causing some ripple effect that cannot be easily quantified. The impact of IFFR on the Mexican independent film industry is multifaceted and includes financial, moral, and cultural dimensions that are difficult to measure precisely.

This thesis also aimed to fill some gaps in film festival studies, which are often approached from a sociological perspective, by adopting a more industry-focused approach. Additionally, by integrating the theoretical frameworks of the independent film value chain, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of how film festivals can influence various stages of film production and distribution. It sought to understand the impact that a specific festival, occurring as part of the global film festival circuit, can have on a particular local film industry—in this case, the Mexican film industry. Moreover, by examining the individual impact on filmmakers, the research adds an interesting layer that could be further explored in future film festival studies. Understanding how festivals influence not just the industry but also the careers and creative processes of individual filmmakers provides a comprehensive view of their role in promoting artistic and cultural development.

An additional objective of this research was to bring a unique perspective to the film industry discussion by incorporating viewpoints from a developing country, thereby adding depth to a conversation often dominated by a Europe-U.S. dichotomy. Future research could further explore the emergence of digital distribution platforms and the integration of developing countries, such as Mexico, into the international market of cultural goods and services, particularly within the film industry. This integration creates new opportunities to address issues of access, representation, and equitable distribution. Investigating how the independent film value chain is being transformed by the rapidly evolving landscape of streaming services, with a more industry-focused approach, could provide valuable insights into these dynamics.

To conclude, the International Film Festival Rotterdam, through its Hubert Bals Fund and other initiatives and programmes, has played a key role in the development of Mexican independent cinema. The festival's support has enabled filmmakers to bring diverse and bold narratives to the global film landscape, enriching both the Mexican independent film industry and the international film community. The symbiotic relationship between IFFR and Mexican cinema continues to thrive. I witnessed this myself in the 2024 edition, where I had the opportunity to watch amazing cinema from my country. This demonstrates the enduring importance of film festivals in promoting diversity in cinema through supporting independent filmmaking. While there are ongoing challenges and controversies, the collaboration between IFFR and Mexican filmmakers has undeniably contributed to the growth and recognition of Mexican cinema on a global scale. Maria Novaro and Amat Escalante are living proof of this. This thesis contributes to the academic field of film festival studies by providing a detailed analysis of this relationship, a symbiotic one that, for cinema's sake, will continue to thrive.

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