

## Final Report U30 Sessions

### Locarno Pro

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Within the film industry there are not many training spaces for people involved in the exhibition field, who are the main link between films and audiences. Learning is usually self-taught and is shared mainly among people who have access to film festivals - especially those that have specialized spaces for sales and projects in development, such as film markets.

This system is like an engine that has constantly worked on its own, which is why it is valued that Locarno is a festival that questions the practices that exist within the last, but not least, rung of cinema, bringing together professionals from various disciplines who work in the exhibition area: distributors, programmers, sales agents, negotiators, producers and more; living together for several days to devise the future of cinema from the identification of our actions in the present.

The program consists of different meetings with established professionals in the film industry, in which they discuss with us their doubts about the challenges for the new generation of filmworkers. There were a total of six sessions and two masterclasses, as well as different meetings, lunches and activities that we shared with more participants from the different *Locarno Pro* activities, such as *Match Me*, *Open Doors*, *Step-In*, *Industry Academy* and others.

#### **Session 1: Film Festivals**

Tutores: Allison Gardner, Elise Jalladeau

Notetaker: Maya Barenstein

What is the goal of a film festival? To get more audiences, films or marketing? Movies are not enough to sustain a film festival, and most of all films that work in a film festivals not always work when they are released months later: older audiences no longer go to the movies, and new audiences do not consider themselves cinephiles. Festivals and films need money and a finance model for their distribution and accessibility, therefore marketing and audiences are not completely separated or in competition, rather the audiences become ambassadors of the selected films at festivals each year, this works mostly with niche films. Therefore, film festivals must continue to be focused on the audience and they need to enforce a good working environment.

Some conclusions in relation to *festival workers* were to pay better attention to how audiences behave. Film festivals can be both: huge and small. Let's not forget the small ones since sometimes they create a better environment to form networks, bonds and significant collaborations, which can balance a working life with satisfactory mental health.

Regarding the *composition of the festivals*, the selections with fewer films are more appreciated as they help the viewer to know the festival's personality. It is not necessary to have long lists of films and prominent names, or else it becomes a competition between festivals, for the world premiere, for example. The ideal is to bet on different scenarios, with small selections in search of what benefits and can give visibility to the films. In this regard, sales agents and distributors must also rethink their working methods when it comes to make films circulate.

Regarding the *sustainability and ethics of film festivals*, as they are supported by sponsors, the ideal is to seek companies that have ethical practices in relation to contemporary challenges such as the environment, gender approach and mental health. Currently these values are one of the biggest problems facing film festivals internally.

## **Session 2: Independent Film Production**

Tutors: Anamaria Antoci, Diana Elbaum, Laurence Lascary

Notetaker: Berenice Hahn

There are mixed feelings on the subject, there is more production even though distribution is struggling, and it is difficult to raise funds. During the discussion we talked about how the money should be redistributed, so new voices can be part of the industry and create an environment where talent can grow. On the other hand, there is encouragement for young producers to seek to work in collaborative ways, forming alliances and co-productions, always being cautious with the needs of each country and the coherence between the work that is carried out and what is financed.

The millennial generation had a different starting point, especially in independent cinema, since before there were fewer financial funds, therefore there was much more competition and less collaboration. This change in perspective affected also other values: now it is very important to make films sustainable, diverse, and to focus also on the production company' economic sustainability. In other words, cinema is too often a source of personal success, but not economic success. Many producers live from their own businesses that distract them from the cinematographic field.

Finding ways to change the film industry has to do with not obsessing over it, being firm in stopping unhealthy environments, since nobody has to go through or repeat the mistakes of the past, building a new landscape and working with different people.

### **Session 3: Theatrical vs. Platforms**

Tutors: Sejin Croninger, Ted Hope

Notetaker: Joao Henrique Saldanha

The film industry feeds different production cycles depending on the success of the films, this is why the producer has a central role even in the marketing strategy of a film. He's also the one in charge of the changes that are generated in the flow of the films, the job opportunities and the path of the market. According to the tutors, an important stage in the life of a person who works in the cinema is going through a certain discomfort in order to grow, especially since technology advances so much that one has to constantly learn and unlearn. However, our position as young professionals is to start incorporating practices that are not violent or uncomfortable enough to distance us from the industry, and to create safer spaces, so that we can start working with directors - and people in general - who respect the humanity of others.

The issue of choosing whether to work or not with certain producers and directors does not mean canceling, but it means that errors from big names in the industry towards those who are just starting out are less and less tolerated. For this reason the work teams must be diversified so that we can incorporate diversity. Let's not take the topics of diversity, inclusion and mental health as "fashionable": they are serious issues with struggles underway, and people who work with those values and principles should be prioritized.

Unfortunately, many times the money or the creativity belongs to these people who promote abusive environments. So how do we make economically sustainable and diverse projects? Who should start the change - the people with power and more time in the industry or the beginners? Actually both, but it is a paradox: many times change starts from below, however, for it to be legitimized it has to be approved by someone who has influence, which is why film festivals, as spaces for legitimizing directors and films, should provide the conditions for these values and this diversity to be exhibited.

This is something that can begin to change in physical spaces, such as movie theaters and events related to the exhibition, however, with streaming it is more complex, where trending is so important.

On the other hand, streaming is the most democratized platform, while movie theaters function like a strange club with gatekeepers. So how do you make streaming content

more diverse? When they don't even call movies "movies" but "content". Somehow, it became a competition between theatrical and streaming, where one invaded the other, for example Netflix acquiring cinemas, that way they don't have to deal with distributors, it makes the business model even more vertical, since they are looking for a monopoly.

This last point affirms that movie theaters are still relevant, but streaming platforms do not accept it, because their objective is business, not audiences. The platforms need to recover the link with the screens, at the same time that the directors should look for their films to be different and fair in working conditions, for this the work system on the streaming platforms and movie theaters must be changed.

#### **Session 4: Film Markets**

Tutors: Maud Amson, Marge Liiske

Notetaker: Tassos Mallios

Film markets are the spaces that enrich films and professionals the most. For this reason it is important to think about making them accessible spaces and to facilitate the participation and connection between people from different territories, thinking of those regions that do not have many film markets, such as South America, Africa or East Asia. What are the reasons why these regions are less connected?

During the pandemic, the need for physical markets to be held in person was put into discussion, also because, unfortunately, transportation to a country far from your continent is expensive and unsustainable. The last three years have shown that hybrid versions work with specific activities, for example conferences and masterclasses, however, to generate links and networking, face-to-face is essential. This leads us to reflect on what aspects of a market we can still preserve in person, the essential, to reduce expenses and allow virtuality to coexist.

Regarding *markets outside Europe*, an alternative is to create markets independent from Europe, that is, these territories generate their own networks through independent spaces that operate on different continents and bet on an alliance between them. In Latin America lately the markets are closing, mainly after the pandemic, so we need to figure out how to bring the markets to these spaces, not necessarily by bring professionals to the main festivals, but in the other way: by decentralizing the markets.

Regarding the *abundance of markets*, it exists, but due to the industry's need, there are more and more films and more professionals, therefore it is necessary to generate more market spaces, the issue is to regulate these spaces with the necessary people for

networking, and also regulating the calendar between festivals, so the same people are not in the same spaces, then can circulate more. For example, Sundance's hybrid platform, which aims to remove physicality for viewing films in development, works quite well and is accessible to distributors, sales agents and acquisitions.

Regarding the *services provided by the markets*, they generate many opportunities and knowledge about different forms of production and funds, however it is also important to optimize the time of the meetings and for that aim, the festival staff must be attentive in meeting us with people who have our profile or interests. Likewise, the services of lunches, flights, and free drinks are some spaces that can be evaluated, since due to inflation issues in many countries they generate expenses, hotel prices rose and the same accreditations as well, for that reason we should focus on what services are invested and in which the participants can collaborate. The markets do not generate incomes, they survive from the investments that are generated in subsequent years so maintaining these spaces depends on prioritizing the most important activities and viatic for the participants onsite.

## **Session 5: International Sales**

Tutors: Susan Wendt, Thorsten Ritter

Notetaker: Malo Jacquemin

Film sales are a very important stepping stone for us to achieve accessibility with different audiences and countries, especially if you know how to change the marketing of the film depending on the territory that you are going to sell. But before the sales, these houses choose which films to bet on.

So, are sales involved in co-production? Many times they are, for example Beta Cinema is a co-producer of many of his German films, but does not bring financing from foreign countries. In the case of TrustNordisk, their participation is not as co-producers, but they still try to get involved from a very early stage of the film through "pre-sales", which is very beneficial for producers, since it facilitates international financing or the search for co-producers. In the case of other companies, they only sell movies that they produce, and at Kinology, for example, they decide which movie to sell from the script stage.

Today, sales are much more immersed in the development of the film, they do not arrive after it is made. At TrustNordisk for example more than 60% of the films have pre-sales, very few wait for the premiere or a great premiere, mainly in Europe. It is strategic because it positions the movie, more people begin to know about it and distributors are more interested in taking it for exhibition in their specific territory.

In relation to festivals, they are a crucial space for film sales, and they are also very important for networking and generating links with directors and distributors, but in relation to a film premiere you have to be very strategic. For example, when Beta Cinema premiered *I AM YOUR MAN* at the Berlinale and won the Silver Bear, it managed to sell the film and sold out in many theaters in Europe. This shows that film festivals continue to be a space for films to be legitimized by reviews and public reaction. However, premiering at a major festival does not ensure that the film will be a success, it is a matter of strategy, knowing which festival to premiere and in which territories to sell it.

Sometimes films are better for a specific festival rather than another, due to their editorial cut. For example *THE GUILTY* is a *very Sundance* film and premiering at that festival allowed it to enter the US market and to get snatched by streamers, who tend to choose "global films". That is why the sales plan today must be made in advance, especially since there are many decisions to be made between Sales, Distribution and Production. Also marketing is a very important part of the life of the film, therefore these issues should be discussed ahead of time.

## **Session 6: Film Distribution**

Tutors: Sumyi Antonson, Arianna Bocco

Notetaker: Wayne D'Cruz

Covid marked a before and after in movie audiences, streaming began to grow and people lost interest in going to the movie theater because they have other screens at home. However, Covid also made us appreciate those rites of social gathering that have an added value, which is why movie theaters and festivals resorted to the "eventization" of their program, with Q&As, drive-in screenings and a set of experiences that make going to the movies more meaningful.

For distributors, these small additions are very important, since they accompany their repertoire of titles, which must also be carefully selected to attract young audiences. This shows that the life of films depends on many decisions that are made in conjunction with the people in charge of exhibiting them - that is, distribution, movie theaters, cineclubs, festivals, and more.

Some distributors with interesting initiatives that have emerged in recent years were the *MOVIE PASS* or *MUBI GO*, in which the box office price can be reduced if you go to see a movie that belongs to MUBI. Some distributors even built their own movie theaters to give greater benefits to their audiences, however this may not be very convenient for

movie theaters globally, since they have to reduce their prices as well, just as independent films run the risk of not finding theaters because they cannot fill them .

In relation to streaming distribution, NEON and IFC work, for example, with external partners depending on certain titles. It seems that both in cinemas and streaming, another good alternative is to resort to film curatorships, retrospectives or thematic sections such as those in Letterbox, which generates empathy with the viewer due to the specific recommendations for their personality and also because they feel part of a community who consumes a certain type of cinema. Building a BRAND as a producer or distributor is very important to build trust with your audience and anticipate new moviegoers, their needs for community and long-term bond, with a catalog of films that respond to their interests.

### **Masterclass 1: with Ted Hope**

Notetaker: Julieta Juncadella

According to Ted Hope, to choose projects there are two main values: sustainability and generosity, in addition to counting that there are approximately seven years of commitment with the director, therefore it is a great responsibility. The industry is changing all the time and is often based on scarcity. Being tenacious, persistent and persevering is important.

Not only the industry is changing, but also (and much faster) the audiences. Ted, shared an experience with a movie at the Berlinale and why a sales agent did not want to take it, because it "was not commercial". It was *The Wedding Banquet* by Ang Lee. It was a queer, Chinese film that seemed coming from the '40s, so sales agents thought it wouldn't sell, however it was well received and sold exactly for those elements. That is why he advises that producing is not about building a brand, but thinking about your principles as a human being and learning from mistakes.

The company has the rights to the work for a long time, approximately 30 years, preserving this file is complicated, digital has made it much easier to keep those files, but Ted Hope's recommendation is that an artist always takes care of his own construction site. Defining a good work that must be cared for is knowing what makes cinema good, for that we must know very well what we love and what inspires us, he recommends writing these things to be able to better identify them in the scripts, thinking not only about producing new themes but also in keeping the important ones and staying as a

director. Finally, Ted shared his own map to utopia and invited us to participate in the exercise:

Define your values.

Persistence and observation of your world, community and company.

Define your qualities for a better movie.

Create a recognition list of aspects that matter to you.

Embrace the practices that help you and your team.

Create a maintenance plan in the market.

Map your utopia.

## **Masterclass 2: From Golden Leopard to the Oscars**

With Tatiana Leite, Maren Olson, Daniel Dreifuss, Giovanni Pompili, Marianne Slot

Moderator: Marcello Paolillo

Notetaker: Hugo Revello

Was Rule 34 a difficult film to finance because of its sexual nature?

Tatiana Leite: The film is about sexuality, but also about politics because of the coup d'etat. Luckily we got the main fund from Brazil before the change of government happens, or else making the film would have been impossible. Still, the completion of the film was complex, as it hindered the shooting, even though we completed the production thanks to the Goteborg FF fund. In the same way, to this day we do not have sales agents because they consider that it is a difficult film for the market, even though it won the Pardo d'Oro in Locarno.

Is it increasingly difficult to find financing for an arthouse film?

Marianne Slot: It is possible, but difficult. Eureka by Lisandro Alonso cost \$2.6M with different locations and schedules, in addition to Covid, there were 28 international partners. It was a very difficult film to come up with, but it finally premiered in Cannes. You have to do some negotiations, the filming can be complex, but you manage to find financing.

When did 30 WEST start as an independent European project?

Maren Olson: We mainly look at the appeal it can have in the US market, like many auteur films that have international actors. We work with foreign directors, but mostly in English so that the film can travel more and can easily be distributed in the United States.

How do you choose a project?

Daniel Dreifuss: The most important thing is the topic, it can be based anywhere, with different people and contexts, but when you have a universal theme, it works for any audience. They can even be very specific topics or historical moments, like the film *NO* that talks about a specific time in the history of Chile, but many countries can empathize because they have gone through similar processes, such as Finland and Thailand.

Then, to finance this film, we had to look for foreign funds. The film was too big for the Chilean fund, that's why we went to the United States. They asked me to make the film in English, but it was disrespectful to Chileans, even so Participant Media financed the film for me, I followed up with them, sent them different letters and it was the first film in a foreign language that they financed. Of course Gael García Bernal was also an added value to convince them. That was a long time ago, nowadays movies travel a lot more and there are more options.

What was the challenge of producing *La Bella Estate* with young actors?

Giovanni Pompili: Everything is a challenge, especially when you are adapting a famous Italian book. In the first place, it is difficult to get a budget for young directors, then there is the issue of language, form, style, maintaining the personality of the film. Regarding the actors, we met Deva Cassel who was half French, which was convenient for the French fund. The first casting was not very convincing, but then in the group the dynamics improved and there was a lot of chemistry. This gives the movie that young spirit in a classical era.

## **Conclusions**

A recurring theme that we found in many of the sessions is the precariousness and excessive work in the film industry, issues related to mental health and working conditions are those that worry young people who, finally, have to take charge of the bad decisions of their predecessors, for that reason we believe that it is not up to the new generation, but it requires a collaboration among all to make our environment grow, focusing our efforts not only on the economic but also on our quality of life.

Some recommendations that we found for U30 was to focus the topics and begin to reflect more on the bond with the audiences, in many sessions we talked about the workflow in the production houses or festivals, in our personal experiences, however,

we failed to detail findings that each one had with their audiences, perhaps one of the reasons is because we don't have opportunities to be an audience when you start to notice the little time that we have in going to the movies and find out who also goes frequently.

We also recommend that the panelists can be more diverse, both in age and the territories in which they work, as most of the tutors were people over 50 who work in the European and American industry. We greatly appreciated the contribution and the knowledge they gave us, but we also consider important that they understand the point of view of people who are just growing up or have intermediate positions, to try to find a balance between their experience and ours.

Regarding the internal dynamics in the U30 sessions, an intimate and safe space was created to talk horizontally with the panelists. We believe that this could be even more efficient if they sit among us and, furthermore, that each of the U30 participants in addition to being a notetaker can be a moderator. In the last session we tried this idea and it worked quite well, it makes the conversation initiated by us and creates a much more homogeneous environment. We could also have sessions where we use the blackboard, notepad or another way to systematize our ideas that make the sessions more pedagogical.

Likewise, we recommend that the panelists and participants have some preparation before arriving at the tables, for example, that they can mark specific questions that they want to explore and topics that we must solve, in this way we optimize the hour and a half that we have per table. Concerning the schedule, it seems a bit saturated to have everything for three days, we would like to be able to have some sessions with the Open Doors people and take part to some other panels that Locarno organizes, so one more day would help to get more out of the festival, do a partial evaluation of the U30 and see some movies.

As people who work in the industry, we understand that synchronizing speakers, guests, activities, talks, and screenings is an acrobatic talent that requires a lot of meticulousness, knowledge, and intuition. Likewise, we know that festivals are living organisms that live in constant mutation, which is important in a festival is its ability to change and adapt to time, territory and audiences, for this reason we are infinitely grateful to the Locarno Pro team, their ability to build such a genuine space, in which big names with recognized trajectories can coexist as well as students and young professionals, this coexistence is significantly important so that the cinema we build can be a space for everyone.