

# Flagship films, audiovisual policies and circulation. The cases of *Pa negre*, *Handia* and *O que arde*

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### Abstract

*Cinema in minority languages in Spain has remained invisible due to the difficulties entailed in circulating small films and the need to dub them in order for their inclusion in the Spanish market, where the subtitled original version (SOV) is a minority option. The presence of what we call flagship films, which have won awards at international festivals and exhibited in their original language, contributes to bringing these films some visibility. In this essay, we analyse three cases —Pa negre (2010), Handia (2017) and O que arde (2019)—and the audiovisual policies that made it possible to produce them and give them visibility in festivals and film listings.*

### Keywords

*Cinema, subtitling, circulation, minority languages, audiovisual policies.*

### Resum

*El cinema en les llengües minoritàries de l'Estat espanyol ha estat invisibilitzat per les dificultats de circulació de films petits i per la necessitat de doblar-los per a la seva inclusió al mercat espanyol, en el qual la versió original subtitulada és una opció minoritària. La presència del que denominem films insígnia, premiats en festivals internacionals i que s'exhibeixen en llengua original, contribueix a una certa visibilitat d'aquestes cinematografies. En aquest assaig analitzem tres casos —Pa negre (2010), Handia (2017) i O que arde (2019)— i les polítiques audiovisuals que van fer possible la seva producció i visibilització en festivals i cartelleres.*

### Paraules clau

*Cinema, subtitulació, circulació, llengües minoritàries, polítiques audiovisuals.*

## 1. Introduction

In the past two decades, the European film industry has undergone profound technological changes (the onset of digital technologies and the arrival of video-on-demand platforms), economic ones (the 2008 crisis and the more recent crisis caused by COVID-19 in 2020) and legislative ones (Audiovisual Media Services Directives of 2010 and 2018). If the new reality of the single European digital market (European Commission 2015) and commercial films' difficulty carving a niche for themselves in international distribution and exhibition is already hard, the situation of films produced in minority languages is much more complex. The lexical transformation of the global to the transnational seems to have laid bare the tension between

the centre—meant as what are called the West European Big Five, namely the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Spain—and the periphery—the home of films from smaller countries, stateless nations or minority language communities. However, the geopolitical debate has been further complicated, and 'hierarchies and differences in scale still matter, perhaps matter even more than in the analogue era' (Szczepanik et al. 2020: 1).

Thus, seldom does a film in a minority language become visible both at home and in Europe, despite the protection that Europe's minority and regional languages have enjoyed since 1992 via the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and the attempts of European audiovisual financing programmes, especially via the MEDIA programme. Distribution

is the 'Achilles heel' of European cinema (European Parliament 2020), which has to vie with Hollywood films and productions by platforms like Netflix and HBO, which not only fail to comply with the European norms on screen quotas established by the European Commission, but also try to get around the audiovisual laws in each territory.

Small cinemas, a name taken from Hjort and Petrie (2007) which we shall use to define these small-scale, low-budget cinematographies often produced in minority languages, encounter difficulties being exhibited not only in international markets but also in domestic ones. In the case of stateless nations that belong to a state that regulates audiovisuals and has a dominant language, the exclusion is even more pronounced. In Spain, despite minor amendments made in subsequent legislations, such as the one contained in the Law on Cinema 55/2007 dated 28 December 2007, which establishes double-screen quotas for versions subtitled in the different official languages, the cinema of co-official and minority languages is difficult to see in the traditional film distribution and exhibition circuits. Tradition, which is firmly rooted in audiovisual dubbing, contributes even more to rendering minority languages invisible, as they disappear in forced dubbings into Spanish with the intention of competing with productions shot in this language on an equal playing field. Nonetheless, there are notable exceptions which we shall call *flagship films* in this essay; they have successful production and distribution models, meaning that they manage to carve out new circuits for small films. We chose the films *Pa negre* (2010), *Handia* (2017) and *O que arde* (2019) as flagship films not only because of their cultural significance but also because they reveal the results of different audiovisual policies and visibilisation strategies which have been decisive in transforming the distribution and exhibition networks and even the audience's relationship with their hypothetical national cinemas.

## 2. Talent, policies and film festivals

The success of small cinemas is subordinated to a series of conditions which encompass not only economic matters but also issues related to the cultural capital of the productions:

Diversity of cinematic expression; secure a more than respectable share of the domestic box-office, win numerous prizes on the international festival circuit; achieve some measures of international distribution, attract funding from various public and private sources at the national, supranational and international levels, and provide a platform for actors, directors, cinematographers and other professionals to pursue filmmaking opportunities both within and outside the national film industry (Hjort 2007: 26).

These conditions for cinema production in small nations highlight the promotion of talent and public funding. The example that Hjort provides is Denmark, which is a country with a cinematographic tradition in place since the first few decades of the twentieth century, yet it boosted its public support for talent in the late 1980s in a mixed system of public funding promoted by the Danish Film Institute (DFI) with the intention of internationalising its production. Thus, the 1989 Law on Cinema eliminated the condition of filming in the Danish language to attract international co-productions while also financing young talent through assistance which required no economic return. Although the financing of talent led to the birth of award-winning movements recognised internationally, like *Dogma95*, with prominent figures like Thomas Wintenbergh and Lars von Trier, Hjort warns that the global focus on filming in English could undermine the cultural capital of the productions, thus limiting the presence of identity features.

Both the different audiovisual policies and laws geared at protecting a national cinema and projecting this cinematographic talent can generate a visible label, essentially that of a national cinema, and entail certain dangers. The complex idea of nation, in the sense of 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983), which shifts cinema into the competitive international market, can also develop a strategy of exotification (Figuerola 2001) when it reduces the different national features to be highlighted to the most unique clichés. Elsaesser (2015) mentioned the same when he speaks about 'self-exotification', when filmmakers themselves incorporate these features, some of them picturesque, to stand out as different in both the international and domestic markets. Small cinemas' difficulties gaining visibility have been demonstrated in previous research (Ledo, López & Pérez 2016; Manias-Muñoz, Barreiro & Rodríguez 2017; Pérez Pereiro, Deogracias Horrillo 2021), which claim that stateless nations encounter even more problems developing 'the label of "national cinema" associated with their territory due to significantly lower budgets and their dependence on state policies' (Ledo, López & Pérez: 2016). Thus, these cinematographies must develop a growth and positioning strategy in their audiovisual policies, as 'there is a direct relationship between institutional investment in promotion and distribution and the impact of this investment at the box office, particularly at home' (Ibid 2016).

Precisely this presence at the national box offices is one of the conditions of success of a national cinema, as Hjort notes, yet at the same time it is one of the singular difficulties facing productions from stateless nations. In this sense, state box-office success contributes positively in the nations that are part of the state. Following Higson's (1989) argument, after questioning the possible existence of a national cinema without a national audience, it is imperative to analyse how the cinema of stateless nations behaves at state box offices and how the policies undertaken by their respective audiovisual institutions contribute to improving their presence in cinemas.

Factors external to the local audiovisual system contribute to forming the label 'national cinema'. The festival system, which has grown and developed into a global circuit, sanctions contemporary cinema, even though its importance in the creation of global success has not been acknowledged until quite recently. Thus, 'the role of festivals has been underestimated: traditional festivals like Cannes and Venice have always been the true source of the new waves of national cinema, as well as the real creators of the auteurs' (Elsaesser 2015: 187). Furthermore, due to large American companies' hegemony over distribution, festivals act as alternative circuits where linguistic and artistic diversity are guaranteed, as 'the multiple levels of cultural intervention (between the international-global and national-regional-local) have opened up room for a broader presence of films from different geographic regions with multiple languages. The international character of film festivals therefore positions these events as privileged spaces for the preservation of linguistic diversity' (López-Gómez, Vallejo, Barreiro & Alencar 2020: 241-242).

### 3. Methodology

This essay is part of the research undertaken within the project 'EUVOS: Intangible Cultural Heritage. For a European Programme for Subtitling in Non-Hegemonic Languages',<sup>1</sup> which analysed the influence of audiovisual translation, preferably subtitling, as one of the factors that facilitates the circulation of cinematographies produced in minority languages. Here, we shall explore three case studies: the production, distribution and exhibition models of the films *Pa negre* (2010), *Handia* (2017) and *O que arde* (2019), paying special attention to the policies that fostered the box-office success of these films in Spain. In addition to analysing data on the financing, distribution and box-office receipts of these films, 31 interviews were conducted with their directors, producers, distributors and cultural managers in order to ensure that these data are interpreted properly.<sup>2</sup> The comparison of the three models not only enables us to assess the transformations in the Spanish audiovisual market in the past decade due to the timing of the production of the three films, but it also enables us to see how the policies developed in each territory have contributed to the development of flagship films which can serve as a model for new productions. It will also enable us to explore the audience's acceptance of the subtitled original versions in other official languages in Spain.

#### 4. *Pa Negre*, Catalan rings out at the Goya Awards

*Pa Negre* (Villaronga 2010) won the 2011 Goya award for best film. This was the first time in the then-23 years of the

Goyas that a film in an official language other than Spanish was given this distinction. Even English had appeared years before Catalan, Galician and Basque when *El sueño del mono loco* (Trueba 1989) and *Los Otros* (Amenábar 2001) had been awarded the best Spanish films. The success of *Pa Negre* spotlighted the existence of other cinemas spoken in Spain's other languages. Its recognition was both institutional and audience-driven: it earned 2,680,155 euros; 439,744 spectators in Spain saw it (ICAA 2021); it was the second highest-earning film in Catalonia in 2011 after *Midnight in Paris* (Allen: 2011) (Caballero 2013: 108); it earned 9 Goyas and 13 Gaudí Awards; and it was the film chosen to represent Spain at the Oscars.

*Pa Negre* is the outcome of public policies developed by the Generalitat de Catalunya (Government of Catalonia) to finance fewer films but give them more support in order to yield high-quality films with large audiences. *Pa Negre* seems to have paved the road to visibility for the Basque language and cinematography with *Loreak* (Garaño & Goenaga 2014) and *Handia* (Arregi & Garaño 2017) and for Galician with *O que arde* (Laxe 2019).

#### 4.1 From a comprehensive Law on Cinema to subsidising versions

A very low ratio of spectators per subsidy and the desire to confer visibility on cinema made in the Catalan language prompted a change in the financing of Catalonia's cinematographic production during the tripartite government of the PSC, ERC and ICV-EUiA (2006-2010): a higher budget for fewer films as a strategy to improve their circulation. According to Antoni Lladó, director of the Catalan Institute of the Cultural Industries (Institut Catalán de las Industrias Culturales, ICIC), between 2007 and 2011 this financing was 'very interesting because without harming auteur cinema, it sought to provide special support for films which were meant for more massive circulation'. Aware that cinema requires financing but that this financing has to give 'the product visibility' to make it 'socially profitable (...), the main focus was on quality and dissemination, and it worked out well. There were five or six productions of some importance' (2014). Those productions were *Pa Negre* (Villaronga 2010), *Bruc* (Benmayor 2010), *Herois* (Freixas 2010) and *Eva* (Maíllo 2011). *Pa Negre* is the one with the longest run, the highest receipts and the largest audience.<sup>3</sup>

This financing policy was part of a *Law on Cinema* which sought to reorganise and promote Catalan cinematography in all its phases, from production to exhibition. However, these aims were thwarted by political, legal and economic conflicts. The *Law on Cinema*, approved by the Parliament of Catalonia in 2010, was the first to legitimise its objectives of access to films in an 'own language' of Spain by referring to the preamble of the UNESCO convention on cultural diversity (Official State Gazette [henceforth BOE] 2011 no.191: 69175). Its basic

goals were not only to foster and promote a smaller number of local productions in OVC (original version in Catalan) yet with greater repercussions, but also to improve distribution and exhibition in Catalan; to do so, it proposed creating a network of public-private cinemas which would prioritise showing films produced in Catalonia and Europe and films of artistic and cultural interest produced outside Europe with subtitles in Catalan. It sought to guarantee that 50% of film sessions would be in Catalan within five years (BOE 2011, no. 191: 69183).

The political parties Partido Popular and Ciutadans appealed the *Law on Cinema* to the Constitutional Court,<sup>4</sup> and in 2012 the European Union deemed it 'discriminatory' for European films due to the extra cost of translation which would be needed for 50% of films to be shown in Catalan; the Commission stated that cinema is a product and that the protection of cinema in an 'own language' runs counter to free competition in Europe. The local cinema guild in Catalonia, the *Gremi d'Empresaris de Cinemes de Catalunya*, which has 81% of the screen share, also opposed it with a lockout in February 2010. This conflictive context was magnified by the economic crisis, with its drastic budgetary cut-backs in audiovisual policy—52.64% in 2011 (Barreiro 2015)—and the change from the tripartite to a right-wing government (CiU). The law soon had no operating budget and was plunged into judicial paralysis almost before it could be put into practice.

The Parliament of Catalonia reformed the law in April 2014. It removed the quotas on European films, deleted the timeframes for achieving linguistic balance in the films exhibited and let business owners choose whether or not to access films in Catalan (BOPC 2014: 27).

This new system has been implemented since 2015 with a series of annual calls for subsidies and bilateral agreements issued by the Service to Foster the Use of Catalan (*Servei de Foment de l'Ús del Català*) and geared towards both traditional cinemas and the new digital dissemination portals (VOD, online TV, etc.) (Department of Culture: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018). This strategy is complemented with a series of bilateral agreements with Movistar+ and Filmin, which contributed to the founding of FilminCat. Traditional distribution also engaged in these bilateral agreements, such as Cines Texas, and it did not ignore festivals, most notably the Sitges International Film Festival, 60% of whose films were subtitled in Catalan in 2017 (Barreiro & Clares-Gavilán 2020).

A comprehensive law became direct funding for subtitling and dubbing; the constrictions in the free market were accepted; and the principles guiding the political interventions were relaxed. This strategy has proven to be useful in increasing the number of films and audiovisuals seen in the Catalan language. Since the implementation of this funding in 2015, the number of spectators in Catalonia of films subtitled in Catalan rose 500% (from 24,123 in 2014 to 133,346 in 2016 [Idescat 2020]),

but if we look at the films in OVC, we see an unrecoverable decline in spectators. The peak was 2010-2011, when the policies to support fewer films with more money began to bear fruit, the year of *Herois* (2010), *Bruc* (2010), *Eva* (2011), *Pa Negre* (2010) and their re-release after the 2011 Goyas.

The current policy increases the number of films in Catalan on different screens, but not necessarily the cinematographic diversity because the producers choose what is translated, thereby shaping the film supply in Catalan. In this sense, Ramon Castells, the director of the Area of studies of the National Council of Culture and the Arts (Consell Nacional de la Cultura i de les Arts, ConCA) suggests focusing efforts on local production if the goal is to foster the diversity of films in Catalonia's 'own language':

'If we want quality products in Catalan, it is more important for there to be local products, to relate the local production of the territory with the 'own language' of the territory, than to make a transposition of the products that reach us and adapt them to our language to make them more accessible' (Castells 2018).

#### 4.2 Language, circulation, diversity

*Pa Negre* premiered at the San Sebastián Film Festival in September 2010. In October, it reached cinemas with 70 copies dubbed in Spanish and 30 in the original version in Catalan, 40 of which were shown in Catalonia. Before the end of the year, it had attracted 139,000 spectators and earned 870,000 euros (Corbella 2017). Its 14 Goya nominations prompted a second round of distribution in cinemas, when it could just be seen in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and Baleares through 36 dubbed copies and 4 in OVC. This number expanded to 100 after it earned the 9 Goyas, including best film, best director and best adapted screenplay. The awards acted as an essential form of promotion which virtually fuelled the re-release of a film that was nonetheless doing well: according to its producer, Isona Passola, speaking in February 2011, 'in all 17 weeks we have never stopped being ranked among the top 20 highest-earning films per copy' (González: 2011).

*Pa Negre* seems to have paved the way for the visibility of Spain's other languages in cinema. This film was given priority economic support by the administration in order to create an important Catalan film which would provide access not only to Catalonia's own language but also its own culture. Its budget totalled 4 million euros, of which Massa d'Or Productions provided half a million and international sales 200,000 euros, while the rest was subsidies, antenna rights or guaranteed public loans. The effort of public policies applied to a good product facilitated the visibility of a film, a cinematography, a language and a culture. The number of spectators of Catalan-language films in Catalonia has never again risen to the levels seen in 2010-2011.<sup>5</sup>

## 5. *Handia*, the biggest one

*Handia* (Garaño & Arregi 2017) premiered at the 65th edition of the San Sebastián International Film Festival and won the special audience award. It reached cinemas on 20 December, earned 750,072.15 euros and attracted 133,296 spectators (ICAA: 2021), becoming the biggest box-office hit in the Basque language to date. It was also the second Basque film to be nominated for best picture at the Goyas, after *Loreak* (Garaño & Arregi 2014). Neither won the award, but *Loreak* was chosen to compete in the 88th edition of the Oscars in the category of Best International Feature Film, and *Handia* won 10 of its 13 nominations, making it the film to have won the most awards. This was unquestionably a huge success for the two directors who repeated the formula, this time adding Jose Mari Goenaga to the directing team, in *La trinchera infinita* (*The Endless Trench*, Garaño, Arregi & Goenaga 2019) which earned 15 nominations and 4 Goyas.

The main language in *Handia* is Basque, but it is interspersed with conversations in Spanish as a second language, and English and French can even be heard, along with bits of Arabic and Portuguese, a novel fact in Basque-language cinema which breaks with the previous trend in films produced in Basque. According to Tamayo and Manterola (2019: 287), it 'paves the way for multilingualism and joins the current trend of reflecting the reality of bilingual and multilingual societies in fiction'. In this way, subtitling has become the ally of Basque. It is present from the very beginning of the film, which the directors view as natural and necessary, partly due to their culture of film festivals. They claim that 'if the spectator has to read subtitles, they seldom mind that the film is in Basque; it's not an obstacle' (Garaño 2020).

*Handia* was distributed in SOV-Basque and SOV-Spanish and dubbed into Spanish, as well as SOV-English (outside Spain). It was released with 92 copies, 30 in Basque and the others in Spanish. The directors of *Handia* recall that in their first feature film, *80 Egunean* (2010), they imagined a bilingual film but were forced to choose because at that time it was considered more difficult to schedule a film in SOV, so they finally filmed it in Basque. Ten years have gone by since *80 Egunean*, and the number of films shot in that language has increased in response to the measures and agreements taken by the Basque government and Basque public television to support cinema in the Basque language (Manias Muñoz 2015). And the figures confirm it. Garaño claims that 'the audience percentage that has seen copies in Basque with subtitles is higher than the percentage of dubbed copies. In fact, it has worked better in SOV than dubbed' (Garaño 2020). According to figures from the distributor A Contracorriente Films, 79.42% of the public saw *Handia* in SOV cinemas.

### 5.1. Policies to support films in Basque

Unlike Catalonia and Galicia, the Basque Country does not have its own law on cinema. However, the Basque Culture Plan (2013) mentioned that the 'new generation of filmmakers, with success and experience in the field of short films', working in Basque, would generate 'an opportunity to definitively address the pending issue of *Zinea Euskaraz* (cinema in Basque) (Basque Government 2003, 6). That new generation of filmmakers was associated with the Kimuak initiative promoted by the Basque administration through the Basque Institute (Etxepare Euskal Institutua-Instituto Vasco) and the Basque Cinematheque (Euskadiko Filategia-Filmoteca Vasca) to make short films in Basque. The *Zinea Euskaraz* matter refers to how to develop a stable policy to support cinema in the Basque language because filming in Basque has never been a requirement to access the subsidies offered by the Basque administration, although at first in order to receive financing, films from abroad had to be shot in the Basque Country or 75% of the technical staff and cast had to live in the Basque Autonomous Community (Roldán 1996). There were no plans to promote regular production in Basque until the audiovisual strategy was defined in a 2003 White Paper (Azpillaga 2013). Therefore, there has not been a systematic language requirement to be eligible for this assistance, except for the documentary series *Ikuska* (1970-1985) and the film versions of literary works from the 1980s, like *Ke arteko egunak* (Eceiza 1989), which had huge repercussions both in the Basque Country and all over Spain, though not the production in Basque. In fact, the topic of these films and production methods sparked a great deal of debate with regard to the identity and nature of Basque cinema (Macías 2010).

Currently, even though the call for subsidies does engage in positive discrimination on the use of Basque, this refers to the overall artistic interest of the project (in feature films, at most 10 points over 75; plus the projects in Basque have more flexible limits on funding and are free of the requirements of being the first or second film by the director applying for low-budget projects). Only when creating screenplays has there been a specific quota policy for funding to write them in Basque since 2008 (around 50%). In this sense, even more significant than the funding from the Basque government is the EITB's contributions to Basque audiovisual production, and since 2007 they have been subjected to investment quotas of productions in Basque (30%), which has translated into a minimum of two fiction feature films and one animation film in Basque per year. The EITB made an investment of 4.3 million euros in 2017 (EITB 2019: 38-39) and 5.7 million in 2019.

## 5.2 New investors

Thanks to the success of the film *Loreak*, the directors were able to film *Handia* with twice the budget, 3.7 million euros, making it the second most expensive Basque-language production in history after *Dragoi ehiztaria* (Barko 2012), (Espinell 2018) and overcoming the mean production cost of feature films from previous years (MCUD 2018: 343).

The film was given subsidies from the provincial government of Gipuzkoa (Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, 80,000 euros), the Basque government (345,000 euros) and the Ministry of Culture via the ICAA (980,000 euros), which accounted for 37.8% of the budget (Herederó 2019: 99). It also received funding from the EITB, TVE, Euskaltel and Film Factory Entertainment, and Netflix joined in by providing around one-third of the budget (Garaño 2020). Despite the fact that Netflix's participation meant expanding or securing the budget, it also conditioned the film's distribution, which Netflix did in Europe, and it was also responsible for subtitling the film in the different languages of the countries where the platform supplies its catalogue of films. *Handia* is currently on the Netflix platform in SOV in all the countries where it operates. As Katixa Agirre (2021) noted, 'from the standpoint of Basque as a minority language, being present on a platform that reaches households all over the world gave it a huge leg up and was a first step in awareness of it', even though public entities are responsible for promoting cinema in minority languages (Agirre 2019).

It is worth noting that since *Aupa, Etxebeste!* (Asier Altuna & Telmo Esnal 2005), cinema in Basque has regularly been producing and exhibiting feature films for the first time (Agirre 2021), supported, as noted above, by the public corporation EITB and funding from the Basque government and occasionally from the new fund to finance cinema in co-official languages via the general state budget—as contained in the 2007 Law on Cinema, instated in 2009, although the PP withdrew this assistance in 2013. Although it was recently announced that the amendment of Royal Decree 1090-2020 which regulates that law plans to expand the funding limits, it should be defined in such a way that it is not subject to the chance of whatever government may be in power at any given time, because as seen above, support for public policies is not merely necessary to guarantee financing but also helps normalise both the production and consumption of cinema in minority languages. It would also be worthwhile to promote assistance for subtitling to ensure that cinemas can prioritise SOV.

## 6. *O que arde* (2019). From assistance for talent to the confirmation of a new model of auteurship

In the spring of 2019, the Une Certain Regard award from the Cannes Film Festival for *O que arde* not only confirmed Oliver Laxe as the most famous auteur in Spain today but also

reaffirmed the presence of Galician cinema as a constant fixture in the leading European film circuits. The award entailed the definitive support for Spanish audiences to go to the cinema to see a film in SOV, an experience which is becoming less and less marginal. All the copies of *O que arde* were exhibited in this version; so on the weekend it was premiered, 54 cinemas showed the film in the Galician language subtitled in Spanish. In 2019, *O que arde* attracted 71,037 spectators (ICAA: 2020) in its premiere in cinemas and another 24,394 in the first quarter of 2020 (ICAA: 2021), before the cinemas closed during the lockdown caused by COVID-19, riding the wave of its Goya for Best Cinematography and Best New Actress for Benedicta Sánchez. The box-office figures, with earnings of 530,110 euros in Spain, also brought high rankings to a small distribution company located in Galicia, Numax, and turned it into the most widely seen Galician film in history. These figures confirmed the success of an audiovisual policy devoted to supporting talent.

## 6.1 Galician audiovisual policy: Between commercial cinema and financing talent

The audiovisual policy implemented by successive Galician governments, more so since 2005, has incorporated the art vs. industry tension when financing projects. The CineGalicia event in 1989, which brought three films to cinemas, two in OV in Galician, namely *Sempre Xonxa* (Chano Piñeiro 1989) and *Urxa* (Carlos Piñeiro & Alfredo García Pinal 1989), and one dubbed in Galician, *Continental* (Xavier Villaverde: 1989), revealed the ambition for Galician films to be shown on screens in its own language. However, the next decade was particularly sterile for films made in Galician. The approval of the law *Lei 6/1999 Do Audiovisual* recognised 'the cultural, social and economic importance [of film] as an instrument for the expression of the right to promote and disseminate its culture, its history and its language, as self-identification data' (1999: 11.033), and in the period 2000-2001 the regional government of Galicia (Xunta de Galicia) allocated 2 million euros in subsidies. However, there was a shortcoming in the support for the circulation of the films, which the industry exposed in subsequent years. Thus, the Galician Association of Independent Producers (Asociación Galega de Productoras Independientes, Agapi) presented a strategic plan calling for the 'implementation of more protectionist formulas (...), fostering cooperation with distribution multinationals, assistance for promotion and dissemination' (Roca et al.: 2016, p. 163). Furthermore, the financial aid system during this period did not deem it compulsory for the production to be in the Galician language, so many of the films were made in Spanish. Thus, Galician appeared in many cases in the obligatory dubbed version to justify the support by Televisión de Galicia, which showed the film in this version several times through the cession of rights.

In the period 2005-2009, under the two-headed structure of the Audiovisual Consortium and the Galician Audiovisual Agency (Axencia Audiovisual Galega), a more determined focus on productions in Galician got underway to make this a requirement or at least scorable in some of the calls for funding. They were then widened into a model designed to administer the aforementioned art vs. industry tension and include explicit support for the promotion and circulation of the financed films. On the one hand, assistance for productions and co-productions 'with content related to Galician culture' (AGADIC 2020) was maintained, which made a distinction between those that were to be made with a budget under 1,200,000 euros, in which cinematographic diversity was primarily valued, and those with a higher budget, which have to show 'special cinematographic, cultural and social value' (AGADIC 2020). In both cases, the use of the Galician language is a positive factor inasmuch as points could be earned from its use in filming.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the use of the Galician language is obligatory in the call for 'Subsidies for audiovisual creation for the development and promotion of Galician audiovisual talent'. This system of funding, which was started in 2007 and has been offered every year except 2012,<sup>7</sup> is organised into three modalities: assistance for the screenplay, for making short films and for making feature films, which are allocated 5,000, 6,000 and 30,000 euros, respectively. Therefore, there is 'a correlation between the economic dimension of the audiovisual project and the choice of language, such that Spanish is related to higher-budget productions, while Galician is associated with smaller-budget films' (Roca et al. 2016: 174).

In terms of the direct support for the circulation of Galician audiovisuals, the 'Subsidies for the promotion, commercialisation and exhibition of Galician audiovisual products' was announced in 2014, given the urgent need for these productions to gain visibility in international markets. The main goal of this funding was for the films to be submitted to the film festivals recognised by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF), which enabled small productions with artistic potential to participate in festivals like the ones in Locarno, Rotterdam and Cannes and the Berlinale. In this sense, through the assistance for audiovisual talent, the international success of what is known as the Novo Cinema Galego (NCG) was gestated, which demonstrated for visibility purposes the greater profitability of assistance geared at more artistic and experimental films than the financing designed for more conventional productions.

The new auteurs' careers were promoted with the funding for talent, gaining international recognition for the label of Novo Cinema Galego through their films' participation in the leading festivals and markets. The triumph of *O que arde* in awards and box-office receipts is therefore not surprising; instead, policies and talent enabled the launch of a flagship film which upset this rivalry between art vs. industry for the first time by getting an auteur film to be embraced by both critics and large audiences.

## 6.2 Financing and distribution of *O que arde*

*O que arde* is organised as a Spanish (50.13%), French (30.75%) and Luxembourgish (18.9%) coproduction and therefore received financing from institutions in all three countries, while at a supranational level it received European funding. In this sense, one of the film's fundamental supports was provided by the European coproduction programme Euroimages, which gave it 200,000 euros. This public assistance, like what was donated by the French programme to finance international cinema Cinémas du Monde (CNC), bore in mind the fact that the film was part of a minority culture and was going to be shot in a European minority language.<sup>8</sup> The programme AFS CineWorld in Luxemburg also gave the film 200,000 euros. However, the largest amount of public funding came from AGADIC, which financed the film with 209,109 euros in the category of feature films with a budget under 1,200,000 euros. The film also earned the aforementioned assistance for the promotion and dissemination of Galician audiovisuals. It is significant that the ICAA is the public body that gave the film the lowest amount (103,564 euros), when the film's ultimate classification is Spanish, perhaps due to some vagueness in the 'difficult work' status which was amended in the 2015 funding.

## 7. Discussion and conclusions

The comparison of the production and distribution processes and the exhibition results of the three case studies, *Pa negra* (2010), *Handia* (2017) and *O que arde* (2019), enables us to draw conclusions on the evolution of the production and reception of films in minority languages in Spain in recent years.

First, we should highlight the importance of what we have called flagship films, which are used to pave the way for other productions in the co-official state languages. The production figures on the three films, which are medium-sized European productions, show that there is a return of spectators who are interested in seeing their cultures and languages on the big screen (Table 1).

In this sense, *Pa negra* (2010) seems to have lifted the barriers for films in minoritised languages in Spain at the Goyas, contributing to popularise these cinemas outside their territory and foster diversity. The success of the film is due to public policies designed to foster the visibility of Catalan cinematography which took the number of spectators of films in Catalan to levels which have never again been reached, and which seem to have opened up audiences less specialised in films in state languages other than Spanish.

The film about the giant Aia, *Handia* (2017), has signalled a shift in the use of Basque as the language of the film by showing it as both a local and international language; Basque is an important part of the multilingual film, where it shares space with other hegemonic languages with complete normality.

**Table 1. Figures on production and exhibition in Spain**

	Production budget	Number of spectators	Earnings
<i>Pa negre</i> (2010)	4,000,000 euros	439,744	2,680,155 euros
<i>Handia</i> (2017)	3,700,000 euros	133,296	750,072.15 euros
<i>O que arde</i> (2019)	1,219,991 euros	95,431	530,110 euros

Source: ICAA, 2021. Made by authors.

Thus, the subtitles become the natural ally of the consumption of cinema in Basque. Before it, *Loreak* (2014) had become a flagship film thanks to its success, which the directors harnessed to carry out a much more ambitious project like *Handia* (2017). Yet beyond what the Netflix platform was able to provide for its production, once again institutional support, in this case via the EITB, was revealed to be crucial to normalising cinema in minority languages. Therefore, this support must be consistent and regular.

The success of *O que arde* (2019) in both festivals like Cannes and at the box office turns it into a flagship film which led it to replace *Sempre Xonxa* (1989) as the emblem of Galician cinema 30 years later. In addition to showing the positive results of the funding for talent created by the Galician administration, which promoted the works of auteurs like Oliver Laxe, one of the representatives of the Novo Cinema Galego, it also demonstrated that there are audiences for films in subtitled original versions. In this sense, the film enabled the Galician language to ring out in cinemas all over Spain, which made it among the 20 most seen films in 2019.

Thus, the number of cinemas that offer SOV, as well as the number of spectators, which continues to be marginal compared to those who go to see dubbed films, leads us to believe that measures are needed to promote the subtitled original versions of films shot in minority languages in Spain. In fact, both Passola and Goenaga believed that their films had worked very well in the original version in the cinemas of Madrid, due partly to the cinephile culture in SOV and the population concentration there. This also holds true for Barcelona, which had 13 original version cinemas in early 2020.

The regional policies to promote their cinematography, which are more or less effective, are at odds with the state's apathy towards contributing to the country's film diversity to promote a cinematography in all the state languages and relative to all its cultural diversity. In fact, since 2013 the different governments of Spain have failed to fulfil their obligation to subsidise productions in co-official languages, as stipulated in Law 55/2007. The amendment of this law through Royal Decree 1090/2020, dated 9 December 2020, seeks to expand the limits of this funding: 'audiovisual works shot entirely in one of the co-official languages other than Spanish which are exhibited in Spain in this co-official language or subtitled may receive up to 80% financing' (BOE: 2020, p. 112857). This expansion of the percentage that can be subsidised may enable

acceptance of co-official languages while respecting the original version to be explored, and it may offset the complications stemming from European policies whose actions are centred on languages with a state, rendering the policies for the languages of stateless nations uncovered and validating principles like free competition over diversity. However, the Draft General Audiovisual Communication Law (Government of Spain 2021) contains no explicit indications on implementing a quota policy for productions in minority languages, despite the fact that its articles claim the importance of diversity. In any case, not only does the promotion of cinematographic productions in co-official languages befall the regional institutions, but it must be accepted that these languages are as official as the language of the nation-state.

Furthermore, bearing in mind that distribution is one of the weakest points of European cinema, we understand that a specific programme to contribute to creating subtitles in minority languages would be the next logical step after the success of the flagship films analysed. This programme could be part of the measures aimed at improving the circulation of European cinema promoted by the MEDIA sub-programme, because as supranational measures they could offer coverage to the languages contained in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. In this sense, if the ICAA offered figures on the dubbed and subtitled versions along with figures on screen quota, this would help future analyses of filmographies in minority languages and those in foreign languages.

The importance of talent and programmes that seek to promote it, along with audiovisual policies that encourage the visibility of minority productions, could contribute to ensuring that cinematographic expression is more diverse and that flagship films in minority languages cease being the exception to the rule.



## Notes

1. ERDF / Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities – State Research Agency / ref. CS00216-76014-R
2. These interviews are part of the research undertaken in the EUVOS project, in addition to those conducted just for the purposes of this essay. The bibliography only contains those from which quotations have been drawn or whose interviewees are cited in the text.
3. *Bruc* earned 1,187,515.31 euros and had 188,653 spectators; *Herois* earned 470,202.35 euros in box-office receipts, and 76,549 people went to see it; *Eva* earned 904,675.54 euros and had 142,261 spectators; and *Pa Negre* brought in 2,680,155 euros and was seen by 439,744 people.
4. As a whole or by articles, specifically those that supported this local cultural policy in the new Statute of Autonomy (2006), which the PP appealed and the Constitutional Court declared partly unconstitutional in 2010.
5. Even though the complete 2017 or 2018 data are not yet available from Idescat (as of 23/06/2021), we can assume that despite the widespread circulation of *Estiu 1993* and the awards it has won (SIMÓN: 2017), it nonetheless did not reach the 2010-2011 levels because there was no particularly prominent group of films and because of indications of smaller number of spectators in Spain as a whole (197,592 spectators, according to the ICAA).
6. We should note that the use of Galician as a language of filming accounted for 25 of the 60 points needed to secure financing in 2008, while in the 2020 it was only 10 points out of a maximum of 150.
7. The fact that the calls for funding for talent were not announced in 2012 sparked worried reactions in the industry, which were channelled into a manifesto signed by 41 of the filmmakers who had been the beneficiaries of this assistance in previous years (PÉREZ PENA 2012).
8. These figures are from an interview with the film's producer, Xavi Font, in July 2020.

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