



# Fictional Television Festivals in Spain as Industry Drivers

LOS FESTIVALES DE FICCIÓN TELEVISIVA EN ESPAÑA  
COMO DINAMIZADORES DE LA INDUSTRIA

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**Abstract:** This article explores Spanish festivals dedicated to fictional television. A mixed methodology was used to analyze the data, combining descriptive and explanatory research with ethnographic techniques and in-depth interviews. The aim was to observe, describe and examine the content and workings of the four main festivals in the Spanish circuit: Serializados Fest, Conecta Fiction & Entertainment, Iberseries y Platino Industria, and South International Series Festival. The results showed that these events serve several key purposes, including networking among professionals, buying and selling of television series, securing funding, training creators, and promoting series through premieres, open discussions and talks. It is concluded that these festivals play a crucial role in strengthening Spain's fictional television industry.

**Keywords:** Television Festivals; Fictional Television; Cultural Networks; Production; Distribution; Television.

**Resumen:** Este artículo desarrolla una aproximación al panorama de los festivales españoles especializados en ficción televisiva. Para analizar los datos se propone una metodología mixta: descriptiva y explicativa, que aplica técnicas etnográficas y entrevistas en profundidad, con el objetivo de observar, describir y analizar el contenido y funcionamiento de los cuatro principales festivales que conforman el circuito en España (Serializados Fest, Conecta Fiction & Entertainment, Iberseries y Platino Industria y South International Series Festival). Los resultados distinguen varias funciones relevantes en estos eventos: la creación de redes y sinergias entre profesionales, la compraventa de obras, la búsqueda de financiación, la formación de creadores y la promoción de series a través de estrenos, coloquios y charlas, que concitan la asistencia de públicos y medios de comunicación. Se concluye que los festivales de ficción televisiva se han convertido en un elemento clave dentro del sector y que contribuyen de forma significativa a la consolidación de la industria en España.

**Palabras clave:** festivales de televisión; ficción televisiva; redes culturales; producción; distribución; televisión.



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## 1. Introduction

Fictional television has positioned itself as a key element in both the audiovisual industry and the entertainment sector. Cascajosa Virino (2016) argued that the culture of TV series is the result of a process of cultural legitimisation that has taken place since the beginning of the 21st century due to a combination of institutional, socio-economic and technological factors. One of the most visible consequences of the boom in this sector has been the appearance and proliferation of events specialising in fictional television. Although they bear some similarities to film festivals, these gatherings are different in nature. They not only screen, place in competition and promote TV shows, but also focus on activities that help the industry grow, such as business deals and interaction between different players in the TV industry. This includes professionals involved in creating, producing, and distributing television series, along with journalists, academics, and cultural curators who are experts in fictional television. The uniqueness of fictional television festivals lies in their aspiration to become venues for stimulating and boosting the industry.

There are currently well-established fictional television events all over the world, which bear different names depending on their structure and content. Europe is the core of most recurrent festivals. The most important ones in terms of outreach and influence are: Series Mania (France, since 2010), Canneseries (France, since 2018), Serial Killer (Czech Republic, since 2018), MipCom (France, since 1985) and Berlinale Series Market (Germany, since 2014). These five events were last held in 2023 and they brought together the majority of the television industry's shareholders, with nearly 40,000 participants in attendance over the course of the 21 days.

Series Mania is organised along three main lines: the festival, dedicated to screening television series; the forum, where producers, distributors and scriptwriters of fictional television take part in pitch sessions (project presentations), conferences and networking events (creation of professional contact networks); and the institute, which is educational and is aimed at new creators of fictional television. Canneseries and Serial Killer, on the other hand, operate in a similar way to film festivals, that is, a number of fictional television shows enter the competition and a jury grants awards to the best ones in the different categories. Canneseries follows a similar model to the Cannes Film Festival, and is one of the main hubs for buying and selling television content of all kinds. Serial Killer's distinctive feature is that it includes web series as well as television series. MipCom is also held in Cannes and organised in partnership with Canneseries. It is the largest gathering of audiovisual

content professionals in the world and has a large section dedicated to the television market, MipTV, as well as a forum focused on screening and distributing television formats, especially documentaries and fictional television. The intersection between the two makes it the world's leading specialist event in television series. Finally, Berlinale Series Market, an offshoot of the Berlin International Film Festival, functions as both a marketplace and a focus for exhibiting fictional television series.

A festival circuit specialising in and giving pride of place to fictional television has been created and become gradually established in Spain in recent years. For example, Conecta Fiction & Entertainment has been a marketplace dedicated to the international sale and purchase of audiovisual products since its inception in 2017. Iberseries & Platino Industria started in 2021. This features a conglomerate of activities that bring together Latin American business professionals to establish trade links, foster synergies and promote co-production through lectures, keynotes (addresses on topics particularly relevant to the industry), exhibitions, presentations, workshops and forums. There are also festivals with the main purpose of premiering and promoting fiction. This includes Serielizados Fest, which has been organised by the online magazine of the same name since 2014; and Crossover, which has promoted the culture of television series among the public since 2018. In both cases, the programme includes talks by creators, scriptwriters, actors and actresses, and the screening of national and international series without entering competition.

There are also other audiovisual content festivals that dedicate some sections of their programme to fictional television. For example, FestVal has inaugurated the new television season since 2015 and serves to present and promote the new fictional shows presented by channels and platforms. The Festival Internacional de Contenidos Audiovisuales de Cataluña (Zoom Festival) is a competition that has awarded prizes to different categories of fictional television since it was first held in 2002; Carballo Interplay hosts a competition for digital fiction content produced by young people that started in 2014; and Series Nostrum combines dynamic content with meetings and round tables that have brought together creators of fictional TV series and docuseries since 2020.

Spanish film festivals have also come to recognise the quality of national fictional television. The traditional events, such as the Seminci in Valladolid, the Festival de Málaga, the Festival de Cine de Alicante, and the Festival Cinema Jove, have screened premieres and showcased fictional series

with the aim of promotion rather than competition. The Festival Internacional de Cine de San Sebastián was the first to include fictional television in its programme in 2017.

Events focused on fictional television seem to revolve around the industry, as they operate as venues for networking, promoting, buying, selling, and exhibiting content. They also aim to highlight the development and international standing of the Spanish industry by showcasing productions made in Spain. This is aligned with the institutional goals of the Strategic Projects for Economic Recovery and Transformation (PERTE Plan), a public-private initiative seeking to strengthen national businesses and shape a number of activities to expand the international reach of this industry (Gobierno de España, 2022). These events are also a key strategic area of focus of Plan España, which is part of the 2025 Digital agenda, aiming to make Spain «the leading audiovisual hub in Europe».

The fictional television festival circuit is, therefore, a key element in the current industry, as it helps shape work areas for its main stakeholders to interact. However, despite the growing number and importance of such events for Spanish television, they have not been the subject of much academic research. For this reason, it is worth collecting data about these festivals, observing how they operate and are structured and analysing their contents. The objectives of this study are, firstly, to conceptualise television series festivals in Spain and, secondly, to observe, describe and analyse the content and functioning of these events.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Events specifically dedicated to fictional television are fairly new, and there is barely any scholarly research on this subject. This article will therefore review the literature on film festivals, as there are similarities between their subject matters and backgrounds. For example, Jurado Martín and Nieto Martín (2014) conducted a study in which they held 41 interviews with industry professionals (festival directors, filmmakers, producers) to map Spanish film festivals and describe their most representative functions. The study found that festivals are useful for promoting new creators, disseminating film culture and serving as meeting points for professionals and the audience, as well as for providing a space for negotiation between the industry and government. In another study (Jurado Martín and Cortés Selva, 2018) researchers carried out 147 interviews with industry professionals, Communication Studies scholars, journalists and film library heads, and classified festivals based on parameters

like budget, prizes and attendance. Both studies concluded that film festivals play a vital role as marketplaces for the promotion and distribution of fictional television products.

The ongoing growth of the international audiovisual industry has stimulated some research into the rise of new film festivals (Peirano, 2016) and the changes in their structure and content (Peirano, 2018). These studies looked at how the stakeholders in television festival participate in Chile and concluded that the increase in these events was linked to the growth of festivals worldwide. They also found that this development and their position in the global landscape have also been driven by government policies supporting the expansion of this national industry. There have also been several monographs and annual publications dedicated to the status and evolution of international film festivals (Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009; Iordanova and Cheung, 2010; Iordanova and Leshu, 2012; Marlow-Mann, 2013), according to their particular geographical area, such as Latin America (Peirano and Vallejo, 2020), Europe (De Valck, 2007), the Middle East (Iordanova and Van de Perr, 2014) and East Asia (Iordanova and Cheung, 2011). In all these studies, the festivals in each region have been mapped and case studies used to identify the main characteristics of the most important ones.

Other studies have analysed the participation of the stakeholders in these festivals. These have included research into audience involvement by looking at 19 Spanish festivals, based on 480 spectator surveys and 32 in-depth interviews with sociologists, festival organisers and leaders of cultural organisations (Palma *et al.*, 2014). Jury profiles have also been investigated, particularly those at the 2021 San Sebastian Festival, revealing a highly-educated jury mostly made up of women who were active in the film industry, but with little previous jury experience (Jurado Martín, 2022). The growing presence of television series at film festivals and their forms of participation has also been examined. The results have confirmed that festivals are now valid platforms for showcasing series beyond the TV screen (Soria, 2020). Additionally, Cascajosa Virino (2018) studied the strategy used by Movistar+ in 2017, when it premiered its first TV series at festivals like FesTVal and the San Sebastian Film Festival.

The economic and tourism impact of festivals has been analysed in several studies (Devesa, 2006; Araújo Vila and Domínguez Vila, 2012; Devesa *et al.*, 2012; Flores Ruiz, 2015). These confirmed that festivals significantly boost tourism in host cities like San Sebastian, Huelva, Valladolid and Valdivia, and are part of broader economic development strategies. For instance, the Festi-

val Iberoamericano held in Huelva brought 1.5 million euros to its city, while the Valdivia International Film Festival generated over 350,000 euros (353 million pesos) for its local economy.

It is also useful to review the research conducted on the methods and tools used to analyse film festivals, such as the studies by Vallejo (2014a) and Peirano and Vallejo (2021). They outlined and explained various sources and techniques extracted from Film Festival Studies, including archival materials, ethnographic documents and content analysis. The review shows that this is a heterodox field that uses methods from different disciplines that includes anthropology, sociology, economics, cultural studies, history and media studies. As interest in film festivals grows and the need for accurate, rigorous knowledge increases, there is a call for more specialised methods and improved research models (Peirano and Vallejo, 2021). A model of analysis focusing on the role and impact of film festivals in Latin America has been used to help achieve this (Campos-Rabadán, 2020).

Film festivals are events that have been studied from a multidisciplinary perspective. In terms of methodological design, there has been a preference for qualitative approaches. A wide variety of techniques to provide a general overview of the situation are commonly applied in these studies. The most recurrently used have included mapping; interviews and surveys, for cases more focused on perceptions and assessments; participant observation, to obtain knowledge about internal dynamics and organisational structures; and case studies, for economic and professional profile analyses.

### 3. Methodology

The main aim of this paper was to understand and describe the nature of the events that specialise in fictional television in Spain. The following research questions were initially posed to guide the study: (1) What is a TV series festival? (2) What are the contents, functioning and modes of participation of those held in Spain? (3) What purposes do TV series festivals serve in the TV fiction sector?

To address these questions, a descriptive and explanatory study was conducted to analyse the features and processes of fictional television events, as well as their causes and conditions (Hernández-Sampieri *et al.*, 2014). This applied research aimed to create knowledge that could improve and expand these events. Regarding the design and procedures employed, a qualitative approach was selected to explore the natural development of these processes (Corbetta, 2003) and perform a detailed analysis of each event's dynamics and

operations. This method can help gather perspectives from stakeholders and essential descriptive data from their testimonies, actions and observable behaviours (Pérez-Serrano, 1994).

The research sample was made up of the four most important fictional television festivals held on the Spanish circuit: *Serielizados Fest* (since 2014); *Conecta Fiction & Entertainment* (since 2017); *Iberseries y Platino Industria* (since 2021); and *South International Series Festival* (since 2023). These festivals were chosen for their impact on the audiovisual industry, for their innovative content, for their ability to attract audiences, for the media interest that they have attracted, and for their mobilisation of economic resources. According to data extracted from the press releases published by the festivals themselves, more than 3,000 industry stakeholders participated in these events in 2022 and 2023. More than 8,000 meetings between professionals took place at the networking festivals. Over 180 projects were presented at the marketplaces and there were interactions with more than 80 buyers. More than 400 professionals from the technical and artistic teams involved in fictional television shows took part in the different types of events: open discussions, presentations, red carpets and meetings with fans. The audience for the screenings was in excess of 8,300 people.

The fieldwork took place between September 2022 and October 2023, and included the 3rd *Iberseries y Platino Industria Festival* ('*Iberseries*') (held on 27-30 September 2022 in Madrid); the 9th *Serielizados Fest* ('*Serielizados*') (held on 18-22 October 2022 in Barcelona and 25-29 October 2022 in Madrid); the 7th *Conecta Fiction & Entertainment Festival* ('*Conecta*') (held on 26-29 June 2023 in Toledo); and the 1st *South International Series Festival* ('*South*') (held on 6-12 October 2023 in Cadiz).

Two research techniques were used. One was participant observation, which consisted of the researcher attending the event, recording the experiences of participants and organisers in situ and analysing the relationships between them and the different activities (Peirano, 2018; Velasco and Díaz de Rada, 2006). In-depth interviews were the second data-gathering technique used. Six interviews were conducted with different participants from the four festivals in the sample, including scriptwriters, producers, consultants and representatives of governmental institutions (Table 1). The interviews took place in person during the festivals. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered which contained questions related to their participation in the event and their views on how festivals operate within the industry. Other

questions were then asked on an individual basis, depending on each participant's position and role within the festival.

**Table 1.** *List of interviewees and position held*

Name	Position
Fabia Buenaventura	Head of the ICEX Audiovisual Department
Teresa Migoya	RTVE International Sales Manager
Gloria Saló	Production and Content Consultant at GECA
Claudia Tornos	Project and Business Coordinator at Secuoya Studios
Juanjo Verdura	Scriptwriter and participant in Fundación SGAE's Talents programme
Miguel Ángel Villanueva	Film Commissioner of Castilla-La Mancha Film Commission

Source: prepared by the authors.

These conversations made it possible to «further understand the experiences, feelings and perspectives of the interviewees, as well as to generate new knowledge by engaging in dialogue with the participants» (Peirano and Vallejo, 2021: 29). The ethnographic research paradigm seeks to describe and interpret the social dynamics of a group, as its aim is to outline the behaviour and roles played by people in a given context and system (Hernández-Sampieri *et al.*, 2014).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Purposes of TV series festivals

#### 4.1.1. Networking, building contacts and creating synergies

One of the main reasons for attending these events is networking, i.e. creating contacts to establish professional relationships that can lead to future collaborations (Vallejo, 2014b: 77). These festivals provide opportunities for meetings between creators, directors, production companies and distributors. This purpose is the backbone of how some events (such as Iberseries and Conecta) operate. In both of these festivals, the organisers make a virtual platform available to attendees for them to connect. Each user creates a profile which includes their professional background, interests and expectations, and the application then generates a calendar with availability for possible meetings. In this way, each accreditation holder can request to make an appointment with any attendees that they are interested in meeting. The festival provides a space (networking area) for these meetings to be held, with chairs, tables, plug sockets and internet connection. These areas were always busy with partici-



pants having meetings. According to accredited attendees, having these spaces available was the incentive for them to attend the festival. These 30-minute meetings were mainly between fiction creators, who were looking to sell their projects, and production companies, whose aim was to find ideas to develop.

This dynamic was not evident in *Serielizados* and *South*, which lacked meeting areas and platforms for attendees to meet. Claudia Tornos, Project and Business Coordinator at *Secuoya Studios*, explained the production company's objectives at these events:

We are looking to build relationships with distributors, and especially with Latin American broadcasters to sell our product. At the same time, as we are a content production company, we are also here to hear about projects from people who come with their ideas, looking for co-productions and development processes. We have a stand for this purpose: we meet people in closed meetings. There is a very important part, which I think is done well here, which is to introduce the networking or the talks and then approach the speaker (Tornos, 28 September 2022).

*Iberseries*, *Conecta* and *South* also organised activities outside the official programme, in the form of a cocktail party or afterwork meeting, which provided another way of generating contacts.

#### 4.1.2. Searching for funding and development contracts

Other important purposes of these events are bringing proposals for fictional television projects and seeking funding to make them come to fruition. These activities are organised to promote the presentation of projects. The aim is to secure funding, development opportunities and/or second distribution windows. *Iberseries* and *Conecta* provided opportunities for attendees to achieve these aims (Table 2).

**Table 2.** *Opportunities for fiction projects or series to be presented at festivals*

Name	Festival	Addressed to	Objective	Format	Prize
Fiction Pilot Showcase	<i>Serielizados</i>	Creators and/or managers of fictional series	Winning the prize and presenting the fictional product to the audience	Presentation of the pilot of first episode	Yes
Spain Content Showcase	<i>Conecta</i>	Producers	Second international broadcasting Windows	Short presentations of the latest and most exportable content to international buyers	No

Pitch at Conecta Fiction & Entertainment	Conecta	Creators and/or managers of fictional series	Development and/or financing contract	Exhibition of the Project open to the attendees	Yes
SGAE Pitch	Conecta	Creators of the fictional series	Development and/or financing contract	Pitch to professionals interested in their projects	Yes
DAMA Pitch	Conecta	Creators of the fictional series	Development and/or financing contract	One-to-one private exhibitions of projects	Yes
CIMA Pitch	Conecta	Creators of the fictional series	Development and/or financing contract	One-to-one private exhibitions of projects	Yes
<i>Pitch by platforms, production companies and distributors</i>	Iberseries	Creators and/or managers of fictional series	Development and/or financing contract	One-to-one stand-alone exhibitions of projects in progress or in production, or completed projects	Yes
Co-production and financing forum	Iberseries	Producers	International production, creative, financial and sales partners and agents	Pitch professionals interested in your projects at an advanced stage of production in search of co-production or financing	Yes
Iberscreening	Iberseries	Producers	Second international broadcasting windows	Screening of the first episode and exclusive footage of national series	No

Source: prepared by the authors.

Iberseries organisers chose 132 projects for potential development out of more than 1,000 received, according to the interests of the 11 participating production and distribution companies<sup>1</sup>. These meetings consisted of short private presentations (10 minutes) between the creators of the fictional products and the representatives of the broadcasters (platforms, distributors,

<sup>1</sup> These companies were: *Ánima*, *Dandeloo*, *Delart Distribution*, *Dopamine*, *HBO Max Latin America*, *Punta Fina*, *Secuoya Studios*, *Sony Pictures*, *Telemundo Streaming Studios* and *Under The Milky Way*.

channels). In addition to this initiative, the production company Punta Fina awarded a prize for the best pitch (1,500 euros) and a year's support and advice for the development and sale of the project<sup>2</sup>.

Conecta hosted four pitch sessions where projects in progress were presented to investors to seek funding (Vallejo, 2014a: 31). The first session was a key part of the event and focused on three types of fictional television: high-end (high-budget series), co-pro (international co-productions), and music (series in which music is central to the story). The other three sessions were organised together with various audiovisual industry organisations. For instance, the Talentos Pitch by Fundación SGAE (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores) was the final section of the TV Series Creation Lab and featured 33 projects across categories such as comedy, drama, fantasy/horror, historical/documentary, daily series, and thriller/police series. Juanjo Verdura, one of the selected scriptwriters, shared his experience with the process:

A laboratory is a centre where you go to develop your work further. You're with a scriptwriter (in my case, with Ignasi Rubio) and you work with them for four months. We send a dossier. He tells you what the strengths and weaknesses of your project are. Afterwards, you start to see what is missing, what you have to round off until you complete the dossier, a bible. Then we deliver the dossier with the pilot and the laboratory is finished. We have another meeting where we present a pitch and discuss it. And now we gather here at the Conecta to present it to the industry. Now, we will see with SGAE about the viability of the product, who is interested, which production companies or platforms. We don't know who will be on the jury. We know that the people who go to the venue have seen the dossier and have an idea of what they are going to see (Verdura, 27 June 2023).

The DAMA (Audiovisual media copyright) Talents and CIMA (Association of Women in Filmmaking and Audiovisual Media) Talents pitches were held privately with 11 creators and interested producers. Conecta offered 13 prizes provided by production companies, distributors and organisations for the best presentations. Notable awards included a development contract from RTVE for the SGAE comedy *De buena familia* (no date) and 3,000 euros from the Spain Film Commission for the co-production series *Favàritx* (TV ON, no date).

Serielizados Fest, in partnership with the Zoom Festival Internacional de Continguts Audiovisuals de Catalunya, organised a showcase event of fiction

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<sup>2</sup> The winner was Sara Bamba Alía, with its project *Cuando no esté*.

pilots, TV formats and Internet content screened in front of an audience. The competition featured pilots up to 35 minutes long. Five finalists competed for two prizes: the jury's prize of 1,500 euros sponsored by DAMA, and the audience's prize of 300 euros. The showcase event aimed to present projects to both the public and potential producers to secure funding.

These festivals also provide opportunities for production and distribution companies to find partners for new projects (co-productions), and to sell their content in second distribution windows. The production companies Caballo Films, El Estudio, Onza and Zebra Producciones presented projects at an advanced stage of production in the Co-Production Forum at Iberseries. Gloria Saló, Production and Content Consultant at GECA, argued that «co-production has become a fundamental element in fictional show production». In terms of distribution, Atresmedia, Onza, Filmax, Movistar+, The Mediapro Studio and Mediterráneo presented a video summary of their contents at Conecta. Eleven series were screened at Iberseries for this purpose. Teresa Migoya, RTVE International Sales Manager, highlighted the importance of second windows:

We show everything that is done by Televisión Española, both channels and content that we can get 'en la lata' [in the can], as we say, already produced. We try to find buyers, in this case, Latin American buyers, but also distributors from the United States, who come here. Marketplaces are essential to meet clients, to get products and projects seen ... It is the best way. The life of a series does not end with its being broadcast on TVE (Migoya, 29 September 2022).

#### 4.1.3. Series Premieres and Promotion

The presentation and promotion of new titles is a key part of festivals. Using a festival model in this way attracts the attention of the industry, the audience and also the media during the festival, which results in the shows being known. As a result, these events are often used for the premiere of fictional television products. Series being premiered is one of the main focuses of their programme for *Serielizados* and *South*. *Serielizados* features TV series<sup>3</sup> followed by a discussion with the technical and artistic team. This contributes to promoting the series through talks where creators and actors discuss how the

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<sup>3</sup> *No me gusta conducir* (Sayaka Producciones, 2022) and *Pobre diablo* (Rockyn Animation, Buendía Estudios, 2023) were presented in Madrid; whereas *La ruta* (Caballo Films, 2022-present), *Fácil* (Colosé Producciones, 2022) and *Smiley* (Minoría Absoluta, 2022) were featured in Barcelona.

productions are constructed<sup>4</sup>. South premiered the first episodes of different series<sup>5</sup> in the official section, as well as others outside of the competition<sup>6</sup>. Another part of South's programme consisted of screenings of productions already premiered and produced in Andalusia, and previews of shows in production<sup>7</sup>, which were accompanied by discussions with the artistic team. These screenings at both festivals were open to the public —the venues were full to capacity— and to the media, which reported information, reviews and interviews that resulted in the fictional shows being publicised.

Finally, an important goal in this type of festival is to attract foreign fictional production projects to be filmed in Spain. Government organisations often participate in the events. They provide support for international production companies that come to find out about the conditions and advantages of producing in Spain. Thus, ICEX España Exportación e Inversión, Spain Film Commission and Oficina Media España participated in Iberseries and Conecta. Film Commissions and Film Offices from different Spanish regions and cities were also represented in their marketplace sections. In fact, some Film Commissions participated in the Iberseries pitch (Pitch Film Commission) with the aim of presenting the regions and explaining the advantages of filming in these territories<sup>8</sup>. Also present were stakeholders from the national audiovisual industry, such as the public TV channels RTVE and Canal Sur, the intellectual property rights management organisation (EGEDA) and production companies such as Secuoya. They all had a stand in the marketplace area. Another strategy was the participation in different types of panels<sup>9</sup>. This is how some professionals defined their mission:

<sup>4</sup> Talks covered the locations of *¡García!* (Zeta Studios, 2022) and the creative process in *Reina Roja* (Dopamine, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> *La ley del mar* (Studio 60, MacFly Producciones, 2024); *Galgos* (Buendía Estudios, 2024), *Serrines, madera de actor* (Producciones Mandarina, 2024); *Beguinas* (Buendía Estudios, 2024); and the first episode of the third season of *Entrevías* (Alea Media, 2022-present).

<sup>6</sup> *La red púrpura* (Diagonal TV, 2023) and the first two of the second season of *Ser o no ser* (Big Bang Media, Mediapro, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> *La red púrpura* (Diagonal TV, 2023) and the first two of the second season of *Ser o no ser* (Big Bang Media, Mediapro, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Agencies from Andalusia, Asturias, Canary Islands, Cantabria, Castilla La Mancha, Navarra and Zaragoza participated. They operated as a promotional tool, screening works that have been filmed in these areas.

<sup>9</sup> 'Spain, a unique and profitable location'; 'International filming in Spain: all kinds of territories for all kinds of stories'; 'Original content on European public channels'.



We (ICEX) go to audiovisual fairs and film festivals and marketplaces, both in Spain and abroad. Our work is twofold: on the one hand, when we are in Spain what we try to do is to serve and provide information to Spanish companies that want to internationalise their products; and also simultaneously we are available to help and provide infrastructure and information to foreign companies that are looking for either locations or service companies in Spain, or for information on tax incentives or to invest in Spain, invest in Spanish companies, or start production processes in Spain for television series to other parts of the world. That is our main task (Buenaventura, 28 September 2022).

In Castilla La Mancha, the Film Commission is part of the Consejería de Economía, Empresas y Empleo (Regional Department of Economy, Business and Employment). We have the task of looking for both an economic vector of development for the region and the promotion of tourism in our destinations within the audiovisual industry. So we attend marketplaces like Iberseries, but we also have an itinerary throughout the year that ranges from 8 to 10 niche marketplaces. We are developing a portfolio of locations and we are always looking for more projects to notice our region and show that a wide range of content can be developed within Castilla La Mancha. In these markets we also create synergies and engage in communication with other Film Commissions and other institutions, seeking to team up to promote and attract filming by meeting producers (Villanueva, 28 September 2022).

#### 4.1.4. Training

Finally, training is considered to be a part of the programme of this type of event. All the festivals analysed included modules and sessions dedicated to training, both for students starting their careers in the industry and for experienced professionals who wish to continue learning. As an example, the Taller de Showrunner at Iberseries was held over two days and taught by scriptwriters, executive producers and university academics, and was attended by 12 creators with their own series projects. The aim was to expand their writing, production and project management skills. In the case of Serielizados, the Masterclass section consisted of two talks with didactic approaches<sup>10</sup>.

Conecta collaborated with the SGAE in its Laboratory for the creation of television series. In addition, the festival is part of the Going European Programme, an initiative that selects 10 creators every year to be trained in

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<sup>10</sup> The first was delivered by Ana Rujas and Álex de Lucas in Barcelona and dealt with the importance of dialogue and music in the series *Cardo* (Buendía Estudios, Suma Content, 2021-2023). In Madrid, Joe Penhall, creator of *Mindhunter* (Denver and Delilah Productions, Panic Pictures, 2017-2019), explained the creative processes and character building in serial killer thrillers.

workshops and masterclasses on issues related to the design, sale and distribution of a series at three European festivals (Conecta Fiction & Entertainment, Series Mania and Sarajevo Film Festival). Finally, South organised three educational talks<sup>11</sup>.

## 4.2. Participants

### 4.2.1. Creators

Creators participating in the event attended and submitted projects and works to the festivals. Attendees aimed to create contacts in the industry and hold meetings that allowed them to present their portfolio, sell projects or even market their own talent. Participation in the pitches and showcases required successfully completing a selection process. If the project was selected, the creator would be able to present their idea (or material) to an audience to seek funding sources or development contracts. This was not the main reason for participation, as monetary prizes were also an incentive for creators. All the events —except South— allowed screenwriters to participate by submitting proposals and making contributions to the festival's programme.

On the other hand, industry professionals such as producers, scriptwriters, directors, technicians and actors could attend the festivals as speakers at open discussions, talks or master classes. Industry workers shape these events and their participation brings them together with other colleagues, which nurtures synergies and creates opportunities for new projects.

### 4.2.2. Production and Distribution Companies

Production and distribution companies played an essential role in the festivals analysed. They participated by having a stand at the marketplace where they provided information about the company, showcased their works and, in some cases, also offered their services for international projects:

There is also something that we do, providing services, which is becoming more and more valuable in Spain, both because of the tax incentive and because of the locations. We have a department for all the Latin American production companies that want to come and shoot here. It is no longer so much about co-producing, but about looking for someone to execute the project for them (Tornos, 28 September 2022).

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<sup>11</sup> A discussion on the creative process in fictional series was held with the scriptwriter and director Armando Bo; the direction of series in the United Kingdom was discussed with the director Guillem Morales; and music in series was the subject of the talk by the composer Cristóbal Tapia.

These companies were involved in activities included in the programme. Those invited took part in panels, keynotes, showcase events or forums where they outlined their business model, their development in the industry and their creative processes, and they also presented their products and future projects with the aim of finding a second distribution window or partners interested in co-productions. In Iberseries, the production companies Buendía Estudios and Amazon Studios, the distributors Rakuten TV, RTVE and Prime Video participated in this way. Participants in Conecta included Atresmedia Studios, Onza Distribution, Filmax, Movistar+, The Mediapro Studios and Mediterráneo.

Production and distribution companies were also invited to premiere their series at some festivals. This was done at Serielizados and South, and consisted of presenting the pilot episode before the television premiere in a screening open to the public and the media. Normally there was a discussion about the production with the protagonists, creators, technicians, representatives of the production and/or distribution companies.

#### 4.2.3. Audiences

While Conecta and Iberseries charged a registration fee, most of the sessions were free at Serielizados and South, or cost less than 4 euros, which is why this segment had a large attendance and prominence at both festivals. The audience could attend open discussions, talks and master classes delivered by leading figures in the Spanish fictional television industry. These events tended to have a relaxed atmosphere and included a question-and-answer session for the audience to participate in. Viewers also attended the premieres of the series and the open discussions that ensued. In some exceptions, such as the *Showcase de Pilotos* at Serielizados, the audience's opinion was decisive in awarding a festival prize worth 300 euros.

## 5. Conclusions

Observing the analysis of the contents, functionalities and modes of participation, it has become clear that fictional television festivals events are mainly organised to bolster the industry through the sale and purchase of series, the search for funding, and the presentation and promotion of fictional television. These events bring together producers, distributors and creators who, by creating synergies, seek to initiate and develop new projects. Although each festival has its own particularities, they tend to be spaces that require physical attendance with the intention of promoting both buying and selling among



attendees and developing relationships between agents of national and international fictional television. For this reason, part of its programme is based on pitching, that is to say, it encourages the presentation of projects so that creators can obtain funding and production companies can discover new ideas and emerging talent. Several of the productions featured at these festivals were crystallised into fiction series that were broadcast on television, such as *Malaka* (Globomedia, 2019), *Inés del alma mía* (Boomerang TV, 2020) and *Asuntos internos* (Mediacrest, 2024). There are multiple and diverse categories for pitching at festivals which provide an effective entry point into the industry.

Production companies attended the pitches to look for projects, but they also took advantage of their presence at these festivals to offer their products to different national and international agents. The purpose was to secure co-production agreements or second windows for the dissemination of their content. The presence of well-known production companies from the Spanish industry (e.g. Buendía Estudios, Mediapro) at these events has increased in recent years, and they frequently participate in the programme. Other organisations and associations in the sector, such as EGEDA, the Sindicato ALMA (writers' guild), DAMA, and Spanish and foreign distributors such as Movistar+, Atresplayer, RTVE, Canal Sur and HBO also take part in these practices. Film Commissions and Film Offices from various Spanish cities and regions play a crucial role at these festivals. They help production companies by arranging permits, finding filming locations, and liaising with local businesses. They create a network of public organisations that manage the industry's activities. These Film Offices are important because they bring unity to the activities within the fictional television sector and attract filming projects that boost the local economy.

The industry also uses festivals as venues for promoting series, in which some events such as premieres and screenings of significant works are particularly relevant for stakeholders. Although TV channels have staged premiers at Spanish film festivals for some time now<sup>12</sup>, they also do so at these events, where the first episodes of the series are screened in front of an audience before they are broadcast. These promotional events —together with talks, lectures and round tables— are also employed to hook the attention of the media, which take advantage of the festivals to generate content including news,

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<sup>12</sup> The first series premiered at the San Sebastian Festival were *La Peste* (Atípica Films, 2017) and *Vergüenza* (Apache Films, 2017) in 2017.

reviews, interviews with creators or members of the artistic team and result in a greater dissemination of the shows screened there.

The main difference between TV festivals and film festivals lies in their focus, which in the former is not linked to competition. Film festivals award the best entries by recognising the work and careers of some filmmakers, scriptwriters and actors (Jurado Martín and Cortés Selva, 2018: 98). In contrast, TV festivals mainly serve as marketplaces for buying and selling shows, finding second windows and seeking funding for projects in progress, among others. Despite these differences, both types of festivals act as important industry meeting points.

Fictional television festivals have become essential for producers, creators and distributors. These stakeholders leverage these events to exchange ideas, build partnerships, and engage in the production, promotion, and distribution of Spanish TV series. Video-on-demand platforms are increasingly interested in the Latin American market, spurred by the international success of Spanish shows like *La casa de papel* (Vancouver Media, 2017-2021). This is why well-established festivals such as Iberseries, Conecta and Serielizados have expanded the range of activities in their programmes and seen growing numbers of participants. Their aim is to make a venue available for the fictional TV industry stakeholders to meet and promote the business and culture of series across the board.

In short, fictional television festivals are unique events, with their own identity and distinctive traits, and therefore can be studied by using their own specific criteria and categories. Their defining feature is their dual systemic role: they not only promote cultural products and creators, but they also drive economic and business development.

Future research could explore the economic impact of these events on the TV fiction industry to measure their specific effects. It would also be useful to analyse how festivals and distributors interact, in order to understand any synergies and contributions between these stakeholders. Additionally, from a production perspective, tracking the progress of works that emerge from festival training and funding programmes could provide valuable insights. These areas of research could enhance and help complete the effectiveness of the studies on fictional TV festivals in Spain.

## Ethics and Transparency

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### Author Contributions

Function	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3	Author 4
Conceptualization	X	X		
Data organization		X		
Formal evaluation	X	X		
Acquisition of financing	X			
Research	X	X		
Methodology	X	X		
Project mangement	X			
Resources	X			
Software	X	X		
Supervision	X			
Validation	X			
Visualization	X			
Write – original draft	X	X		
Write – proofreading and editing	X			

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