

THE ACTIVITY OF THE FILM COMMISSION IN THE GALICIA-NORTH PORTUGAL EUROREGION AND ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE AUGA SECA SERIES

LA ACTIVIDAD DE LAS FILM COMMISSION EN LA EURORREGIÓN GALICIA-NORTE DE PORTUGAL Y SU PARTICIPACIÓN EN LA SERIE AUGA SECA

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RESUMEN

Las *film commission* nacen con dos objetivos clave: por un lado, uno comercial, conseguir el mayor número de rodajes audiovisuales en un determinado lugar y por el otro, uno técnico, intentando suplir las necesidades de esas producciones. En su esencia, las film commission traen consigo resultados que posicionan el territorio en el imaginario de su público objetivo, aportando publicidad directa y gratuita al lugar en el que se desarrolla y por consiguiente, un beneficio económico. La promoción de las producciones audiovisuales conjuntas entre las televisiones públicas de Galicia (CRTVG) y Portugal (RTP) ha adquirido una gran importancia en la última década en la región transfronteriza Galicia-Norte de Portugal gracias a sus similitudes lingüísticas y culturales que las convierten en comunidades hermanadas. Además de difundir el territorio transfronterizo a través de diferentes localizaciones, esta promoción implica abrir nuevos mercados que la posicionen como destino turístico de primer orden, y con ello la formación de la marca Eurorregión Galicia-Norte de Portugal. Se trata de dar visibilidad al denominado Eixo Atlántico do Noroeste Peninsular y Turismo de Galicia a través de iniciativas audiovisuales (ya sean series o producciones cinematográficas) que se posicionen en el mercado y consigan el interés de las diferentes audiencias. En este sentido, las film commissions se han convertido en una herramienta para poner en valor los recursos audiovisuales técnicos y profesionales de estas zonas emergentes. Se realiza un recorrido a través de diferentes proyectos audiovisuales ya materializados entre las film commissions de Galicia y Portugal en los últimos años, prestando especial atención a casos de éxito, como la serie recientemente emitida “Auga Seca” en la plataforma HBO con el fin de analizar todos los elementos relativos a la promoción del territorio, cultura, lusofonía y posicionamiento de la marca Eurorregión Galicia-Norte de Portugal. Por otro lado, se analizan los estatutos de creación de las televisiones públicas CRTVG y RTP para comparar la promoción del idioma y el territorio en las producciones audiovisuales de ambos canales y países. Esta investigación trata de demostrar la hipótesis de un



aumento progresivo de acuerdos de colaboración y coproducción entre productoras audiovisuales gallegas y portuguesas, y en concreto entre los canales públicos CRTVG y RTP. Del mismo modo crece el interés por parte de las audiencias lo que, se traduce en un aumento de las producciones en todos sus formatos.

Palabras clave: Film Commission; Audiovisual; Promoción; Series; Televisión.

ABSTRACT

Film Commissions are born with two key objectives: on the one hand, a commercial objective, to achieve the greatest number of audiovisual shootings in a certain place, and on the other hand, a technical objective, trying to supplant the needs of these productions. In essence, film commissions bring results that set the territory in the imagination of its target audience, providing direct and free publicity to the place where it is developed and, consequently, an economic benefit. The promotion of joint audiovisual productions between the public television of Galicia (CRTVG) and Portugal (RTP) has acquired great importance in the last decade in the Eurorregión Galicia-Northern Portugal thanks to their linguistic and cultural similarities that make them twinned communities. In addition to disseminating the cross-border territory through different locations, this promotion involves opening new foreign markets that position it as a major tourist destination, and with it the development of the Galicia-North Portugal Euroregion brand. The aim is to give visibility to the so-called Eixo Atlántico do Noroeste Peninsular and Turismo de Galicia through audiovisual initiatives (whether series or film productions) that introduce themselves in the market and raises the interest of different audiences. In this sense, film commissions have become a tool to promote the technical and professional audiovisual resources of these emerging areas. This study aims to realize a tour through different audiovisual projects already materialized between the film commissions of Galicia and Portugal in recent years, paying special attention to successful cases, such as the recently aired series "Auga Seca" on the HBO platform to analyze all the elements related to the promotion of the territory, culture, lusophony, and positioning of the brand "Euroregion Galicia-Northern Portugal". Moreover, the creation statutes of the public television channels CRTVG and RTP are analyzed to compare the promotion of language and territory in the audiovisual productions of both channels and countries. This research tries to prove the hypothesis of a progressive increase in collaboration and co-production agreements between Galician and Portuguese audiovisual production companies, and specifically between the public channels CRTVG and RTP. In the same way, the interest of the audiences is growing, which translates into an increase in productions in all formats.

Keywords: Film commission; Audiovisual; Promotion; Series; TV.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The film commission and territorial promotion

Tourism and cinema have lived in an intimate relationship since the beginning of the latter. So much so, that it would not be possible to list all the tourist destinations that certain films have made fashionable. Not only renowned cities like Paris, Rome, or New York that are well-known film sets, but more remote places that have acquired

unexpected (or expected) fame from a specific appearance. Some well-known examples of this phenomenon could be Maya Bay in the Phi Phi Islands of Thailand from *The Beach* (Macdonald, 2000), New Zealand after *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001), or platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Harry Potter saga (Columbus, 2001) at King's Cross tube station in London. More recent is the case of the different scenarios around the world of the *Game of Thrones* series (Benioff and Weiss, 2011-2019) which in Spain has led to a notable increase in tourism in San Juan de Gaztelugatxe.

During the last decades, the ease of traveling due to cheaper means of transport, together with a certain cinematographic fetishism and the renewed passion for series, arising from platforms such as Netflix or HBO, has been a shock to a certain type of tourism associated with audiovisual consumption and spectacular landscapes. The big screen and the small screen, besides entertaining, have a great capacity for emotional and immersive connection with viewers, which can be translated into purchase and consumption impulses. In this sense, the desire to share the symbolic and physical space of certain audiovisual products can be a powerful engine for activating tourism, especially when it comes to less traveled and remote destinations that also offer the extraordinary attraction of being exclusive places.

In this synergy between the audiovisual and tourism fields, the film commissions are entities that can become highly relevant and tip the balance in the choice between some places or others depending on their positioning and development strategy. The film commissions are, in their definition, entities that are created from a triple point of view: to provide specialized services in audiovisual matters, with a vocation for public service, and as territorial promotion agencies (González-Bennet and Nieto-Malpica, 2013). Their strategic objectives consist of attracting the greatest number of shoots to a specific territory and providing the necessary services for this with local professionals. Normally they also function as specialized directories and facilitators in access to certain spaces. They are entities that are born linked to the administration, although their management can be public or private. For this reason, they are defined as a public service, because they are designed to generate activity in their field of action (Sarabia and Sánchez, 2019).

Ideally, the idea of establishing a film commission or film office arises from the conjuncture of several issues. On the one hand, the territory has places of interest, whether urban or natural, that there is an audiovisual business fabric, and, on the other hand, there is the operational capacity to host this type of project (Nieto-Malpica et al., 2019). Here, once again, the audiovisual business and the tourist business go hand in hand, since this operational capacity also refers to the accommodation and maintenance facilities derived from any filming of a certain magnitude. If this capacity exists, it can also be a relevant enclave for tourism development. In this way, new segments of the public are captured and the local business is stimulated through film tourism (Osácar, 2016 as cited in Sarabia and Sánchez, 2019).

This relationship works in both directions, that is to say: places that are already efficiently exploited, such as, for example, classic destinations such as Madrid, Lisbon, or London, offer suitable settings since they are recognizable, accessible, and attractive to spectators and audiovisual professionals, in this case, they can see the tourist strategy proposed before the hosting of important filming being reinforced. In the opposite sense, places that are not so intensively exploited, but with a certain capacity for tourism

development, can be enhanced by arousing interest from the appearance in a certain series or film. In this case, it is the audiovisual production that forces the development of a broader tourism business strategy. In this way, the film commissions have a strategic role that could be very decisive since capturing filming can bring with it the possibility of laying a pillar on a tourism development strategy greater than that proposed without this additional promotion, as can happen with music or film festivals, for example. The film commissions are organized in geographically grouped networks, such as the *European Film Commission Network*, within which is the *Spain Film Commission*, which carries out its activity through the "*Shooting in Spain*"¹ platform and which currently groups 31² offices throughout the entire country.

1. 2. Audiovisual co-production as a strategic alliance

Audiovisual co-production consists of the resulting collaboration agreement between different entities to create an audiovisual project. One of the main requirements is that the members of the agreement are from different countries, from there the agreement can take various single or combined formulas: joint contribution of capital and/or contribution of technical and human resources (Peira, 2016).

Co-production as a usual formula began in the fifties in most European countries. The aim is to put into practice a competitive strategy to confront US hegemony, share risks and costs, and increase the size of the potential market for films by uniting the audiences of the involved nationalities. In this way, co-productions respond to the need to find more advantageous financing systems resulting from the union of economic resources, tax incentives, and the association of production companies (Kanzler and Simone, 2019, p. 7). This possibility is key when it comes to countries with limited resources or limited markets. For example, in the European case, the potential audience of a given country is very low compared to the real and effective capacity of other markets, such as Canada, even if only in terms of population. It would be out of this equation to mention the US market since its characteristics in this field exceed any comparison. Therefore, it is interesting to establish this type of collaboration to try to expand the number of viewers through cultural or geographical connections (Gómez et al., 2013).

Initially, the co-production agreements had to cooperate in the artistic field of the audiovisual project, but the relaxation of the requirements of the formula to take advantage of the benefits of the system allows collaborations to have only an economic nature or to collaborate in all fields of production. However, there are also drawbacks such as linguistic segmentation that makes productions more expensive, or the necessary artistic and cultural homogenization to make audiovisual products more commercial and cross-border (Pardo, 2007).

1. 3. The Galician-Portuguese co-production

The audiovisual collaboration between Spain and Portugal has its origin at the beginning of the last century. The first works were produced without a joint strategy whose search tries to meet the needs of the shooting more than as an international project. Before the

¹ www.shootinginspain.info

² <http://www.shootinginspain.info/es/red-spain-film-commission>

Spanish Civil War, some interesting films were made, both for the economic aspect (large-scale productions given the capacity of both countries at that time) and for the diffusion of some of these films, such as *Bocage / Las tres gracias* (Leitão, 1936) which, with modest audiences in Spain and Portugal, finds a great following in Brazil (Peira, 2016).

During the Franco era and similarly, in the Portuguese Salazarism, several co-productions were produced until 1949. Many of these films, such as the one by Inés de Castro (Leitão de Barros, 1944) have a clear propaganda vocation to illustrate the Iberian agreement. However, despite the similarities between the two dictatorships, the reservations of both countries prevent collaborations from being very numerous and they are not maintained over time. The potential market that the Spanish-Portuguese production could invoke between the Peninsula and Latin America does not seem to be very relevant and the experience with the Spanish and Portuguese audiences translates into a lack of interest in each other (Sempere, 2012).

As of the transition, ties with the neighboring country are strengthened and a collaboration agreement for audiovisual projects materializes, which dates back to 1989. As collected through the Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts (ICAA by its acronym in Spanish), Spain and Portugal made 64 co-productions between 1978 and 2009 (Ciller and Beceiro, 2013). A very low number for the thirty-one years of the mentioned period, especially if this figure is compared with the rest of the European countries with which Spain has bilateral agreements and taking into account that most of these collaborations fall within the latest decades.

One of the important steps to consolidate this bilateral audiovisual relationship is the Agreement on cinematographic relations between the Kingdom of Spain and the Republic of Portugal dating from 1990 (BOE, 1990).

In the new century, Spanish-Portuguese relations in economic and commercial matters proliferate extraordinarily and between 2000 and 2009 alone, more than thirty co-productions have been made between Spain and Portugal (Gómez et al., 2009).

Some of these co-productions are made between Portugal and Galicia. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, commercial relations intensified, and to define this issue in the audiovisual field, the Galician Audiovisual Law of September 1999 emerged, which includes the consideration of the audiovisual sector as strategic. In this way, the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion is taking shape as a preferred territory for exchange and co-production (Ledo, 2003).

In 2006, *De Profundis* (Casal, 2006) by Miguelanxo Prado, a co-production belonging to the animation genre, premiered. In 2010 the film *Assalto ao Santa María*, a Portuguese film with Galician participation, was made. Also in this same year, the co-production between Galicia and Portugal " *Onde está a felicidade?*" was filmed (Amorós and Comesaña, 2013; Gómez et al., 2009).

The Euroregion's most recent works include the successful series *Vidago Palace* (Oliveira and Coira, 2017), the first co-production between public television in Galicia and Portugal (Íñiguez, 2017), the results of which encouraged the continuation of the co-production system until reaching to *Auga Seca* (Nogueira, 2020). Also, the series *Verão M* (Carvalho and Sequeira, 2018) of Portuguese production and with the participation of

RTVG, which broadcast it on its second channel (Grela, 2018). In 2020, the stop motion project *O Meu Avó* (Cine&Tele Online, 2020) by Caretos Film A.I.E. was made, which is a co-production between Portugal, Galicia, and France.

2. Objectives and methodology

This research is based on the existence of a growing collaboration between Galicia and Portugal in the audiovisual field and attempts to explore this phenomenon in an exploratory way, placing special emphasis on one of the successful audiovisual projects. From a descriptive perspective, the main objective of the study is to analyze the specific case of the *Auga Seca* series (Blanco and López, 2020) and other secondary objectives such as exploring the different projects carried out in the so-called Galicia and North Portugal Euroregion during the last decade taking as reference the selected example to duly illustrate how this type of agreement materializes.

The data that has served to support the theoretical framework, as well as to present the case study, comes from the review of secondary sources through access portals such as Google Scholar and the database of Scopus specialized scientific articles. Also conventional and digital press articles, as well as the search and verification of information related to the television series *Auga Seca* (Blanco and López, 2020) to draw a complete perspective of this production as an example unit of analysis of the recent collaboration between Galicia and Portugal in audiovisual matters.

3. Results

Auga Seca is a television series produced by the Galician company Portocabo and the Portuguese SPi. The first season consists of 6 50-minute episodes that were broadcast on RTP (Radio Televisão Portuguesa) and RTVG (Radio Televisión de Galicia), which participates in the production of the project. Additionally, it appears in the catalog of HBO Spain and HBO Portugal. In 2021, the second season will also be broadcast on TVG and RTP at its premiere and later on HBO. The series is shot between Lisbon and Vigo as the main locations.

Besides the television channels and the platform participating in the production, the project benefited from a grant of 260,000 euros from Agadic as well as a grant for television broadcasting managed by Europa Creativa (Editorial staff, *La Vanguardia*, 2020). Before its broadcast, the series was acquired by the English distributor DCD Rights at the MIP in Cannes (Editorial staff AV451, 2019). The total budget of the series amounts to more than one million euros and exceeds two million euros for the second season, which is pending premiere in 2021 (Atlántico, 2021).

This second season will be extended to 8 episodes that will be broadcast again on RTP and RTVG and HBO Spain and HBO Portugal. The Galician production company Portocabo is involved in many of the most relevant projects in the co-production between Galicia and Portugal. One of the most important events in which professionals who regularly collaborate on audiovisual projects meet is the Co-production Meeting between Galicia and Portugal (Editorial staff AV451, 2019).

One of the most relevant aspects of this proposal is the linguistic combination since the series is shot in Portuguese and Galician. In this way, the circumscribed identity of the

Galicia and North Portugal Euroregion is reinforced, trying to explore mixed aesthetics and cultural references in perfect symbiosis (Editorial staff, Cultura de Galicia, 2019).

Table 1. *Sheet of the Auga Seca series*

<i>Series sheet</i>	
Original title:	Auga Seca (TV Series)
Year:	2020
Duration:	6 episodes, 50 min.
Country:	Spain, Portugal
Director:	Alfonso Blanco (Creator), Toño López
Script:	Alfonso Blanco, Pepe Coira, Carlota Dans, Lidia Fraga
Music:	Elba Fernandez, Xavier Font
Photography:	Ricky Morgade
Cast:	Victória Guerra, Monti Castiñeiras, Sergio Pazos, Eva Fernández, Santi Romay, Cristina Iglesias, Igor Regalla, Joana Santos, Tacho González, Manolo Cortés, Paloma Saavedra, Adrián Ríos, Nacho Castaño
Production company:	Coproduction Spain-Portugal; Televisión de Galicia (TVG), Portocabo, SPI, Radio Televisão Portuguesa (RTP)
Genre:	TV series. Drama. Thriller Crime

Source: Own elaboration from the data obtained in the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB)

Synopsis of the series: Paulo Duarte appears dead in the port of Vigo. An apparent suicide that convinces no one: neither his sister Teresa nor Inspector Viñas. Teresa decides to leave her life in Lisbon and move to Vigo to find out what happened to her brother³.

³ <https://www.filmaffinity.com/es/film625771.html> and <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10495654/>

Figure 1. Promotional poster for the series *Auga Seca* (2020)



Source: Filmaffinity.com. <https://www.filmaffinity.com/es/film625771.htm>

Another issue of great interest when it comes to co-production projects is the one that refers to the execution of the production. In the case under study, the locations to carry out the filming were two of the most important cities in the geographical area of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, such as Lisbon and Vigo. Besides facilitating the logistics for the different production teams, commercial activity is generated in the area and the appearance on the screen, as well as the news related to the filming, act as a tourist attraction. The enhancement of a certain place as a stage constitutes the main motivation for the establishment of a film commission (Sarabia and Sánchez, 2019).

During the different phases of the development of the series - shooting, promotion, and broadcast -, four film commissions have been identified in the area affected by production: Portugal Film Commission, Lisbon Film Commission, Galicia Film Commission, and Vigo Film Office.

When carrying out a detailed analysis of its activity concerning the *Auga Seca* series, there is no reference to the series⁴ in the Lisbon Film Commission's shooting report, although it does include the increase in investment (from 10 to 20 million euros in filming) and that 11 of the audiovisual projects carried out were television series. The same thing happens in the case of the Portugal Film Commission, there are no references on the web, but both entities participate and sponsor events such as *OnSeries Lisboa*⁵, which had its first edition in 2020 and *Auga Seca* has been one of the outstanding projects.

In the case of the Spanish film commissions involved, the Galicia Film Commission has not registered related activity and today its website is inactive. In the case of the city of

⁴https://www.lisboa.pt/fileadmin/cidade_temas/cultura/lisboa_film_commission/filmagens_em_lisboa_balanco_2020.pdf

⁵ <https://www.audiovisual451.com/nace-onseries-lisboa-un-nuevo-evento-internacional-para-la-ficcion-portuguesa/>

Vigo, we find two entities that respond to the conceptual consideration that defines our theoretical framework, the Vigo Film Commission, which focuses its activity on the web and social networks in its training projects, and the Vigo Film Office.

Once these examples have been explored, the Vigo Film Office meets all the requirements set out in the theoretical framework on the objectives and actions pursued and executed by an entity of this type. Through its website and its social networks, Facebook and Twitter, with the profile @vigofilmoffice, it has regularly published content about the series focusing on three fundamental aspects: shooting news, relations with the press, and other entities developing the promotion of the series, and tourism and business promotion of the city developing hashtags such as #vigoplatódecine or #galciaplatódecine.

4. Conclusions

The case under study, the *Auga Seca* series, has been a shock to the audiovisual world of Galicia and Portugal due to the organization of the co-production of mixed teams and business alliances with such powerful infrastructures in both countries as it is an audiovisual project supported by public television in each region and the HBO platform. Also, the linguistic approach in which both Galician and Portuguese have enjoyed a leading role, strengthening the identity of each community and, in turn, that shared as the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion. Finally, its high budget stands out as it is one of the most expensive series in the geographical area and the first that HBO incorporates into its catalog in which Galician is spoken.

When it comes to audiovisual productions attached to a specific territory, the activity of the film commissions is decisive in favoring the attraction of filming to one place or another if there is a considerable business network. Although locations are often determined by the script, film commissions can play a decisive role in providing human and technical resources or production services. They can also influence the promotion of audiovisual products developed and as a tourist destination if the entity's strategic approach establishes. In the case of the *Auga Seca* series, of the four possible film commissions with a direct relationship, only the Vigo Film Office has developed a promotion strategy for the series linked to the promotion of the city as an ideal set for filming and a tourist destination. Also interesting is the constant relationship established with the press and with specialized publications whose contents are replicated and, also, in many articles, the Vigo Film Office appears as the entity consulted for the dissemination of information. Despite good practices, the impact on social networks has very low rates and none of the film commissions studied appear in the credits of the series (in the first season).

After analyzing the case of *Auga Seca*, it is relevant to highlight its successful career as one of the ten most watched productions in Portugal on the HBO platform and the confirmation of a second season supported by audience data (Melchor, 2021). It is for this reason, and concerning the intervention of the film commissions, that we can determine that when there is an interesting audiovisual product and a dissemination and promotion strategy in which production companies, the media, and these entities jointly participate, the commissions serve as support for the production and advertising development of the series. However, today, both due to the figures handled and the media coverage, they are entities very oriented to collecting the agents that operate in the area and that do not develop their full potential according to the purposes for which

they are established. It is of interest to propose for future studies what the real capacity of these entities is based on their strategic objectives and budget items, as well as their continuity over time.

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