



CHAPTER 7

Chilean Film Festivals and Local Audiences: Going Online?

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Over the past ten years, the number and diversity of Chilean film festivals have considerably increased, from relatively informal showcases for local cinephiles and hangouts for filmmakers to professionalized industrial hubs for project development, education, and audience creation. Not without struggles, the festival landscape was flourishing up to 2019 with the increasing professionalization of these events and the creation of networks and alliances both within Chile and with other Ibero-American film festivals. For example, the *RED, Red de Festivales y Muestras de Cine de Chile y los Pueblos Originarios* (Network of Chilean and Indigenous

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M. de Valck, A. Damiens (eds.), *Rethinking Film Festivals in the
Pandemic Era and After*, Framing Film Festivals,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14171-3_7

Film Festivals) was created in 2018.¹ In 2019, we finished a first comprehensive mapping of Chilean film festivals (Peirano 2020)² and found a total of 101 active events, 40 with a long-term trajectory (with more than six editions).

As stated elsewhere (Peirano 2021), this expansion of the festival landscape went hand in hand with the development of national cinema during the same period and its ongoing aspirations to professionalization, internationalization, and the enhancement of local audiences. In this context, festivals became key hubs for professional networking and the reconfiguration of the local field, as well as important nodes of film circulation with a focus on audience creation. Despite this growth, Chilean festivals continue to be rather small events that exist under precarious conditions, facing various economic and cultural challenges that hinder their stability. Local festivals are (exceptions apart) highly dependent on state support. They are created by private initiatives of enthusiastic filmmakers and/or cultural managers who apply to state and regional government funds. Securing this funding is a difficult task, since they need to apply every one to two years for short-term support, and chances are that some events will not take place regularly as a result. Moreover, even if most of them have free admission, they often struggle with audience attendance and seek to increase it beyond their niche audiences, aiming to enhance their impact and further legitimize their position (which presumably would also justify their funding).

This relatively unstable festival landscape was further exacerbated in 2019 with the so-called Chilean *Estallido* (“social outburst”), a series of massive demonstrations and riots that originated in the capital city of Santiago and spread to the rest of the country. The protests started on October 18, 2019, in response to a raise in Santiago’s *Metro* (subway) fares and, later on, to social inequality, the increasing costs of living, and privatization policies. On October 25, 2019, over 1.2 million people took to the streets of Santiago also demanding President Piñera’s resignation in what came to be known as “the biggest march in Chile” (González and Le Foulon 2020). Protests were followed by confrontations with the police and military forces, leading to the exacerbation of social conflict and to a number of human rights violations against protesters, including eye mutilation, torture, sexual abuse, and sexual assault (Amnesty International 2020). The increasing levels of violence went hand in hand with President

¹<https://redfestivalesdecine.cl/>.

²See also some of this research’s results on www.festivalesdecine.cl.

Piñera's declaration of a "state of emergency" in the country, which led to restrictions on freedom of movement and a prolonged curfew.

In the case of film festivals, this socio-political crisis not only affected festival programming strategies (which shifted to more politically oriented standpoints) but also their mere existence: coincidentally, October and November are the busiest months in the local festival calendar, as 39% of them take place during this period. Not only is spring often considered the best time of the year for cultural events, but it also matches the time frames imposed by state funding, which pushes festival organizers to spend their funds, finish their projects, and report back their expenditures by the end of the year (December–January). By the end of 2019, however, a considerable number of events were either canceled or limited due to the political conditions. They had to be restructured accordingly, changing their dates and/or venues, reducing the number of screenings, and adapting their timetables to the national curfew (which in 2019 ran from 7.00 pm to 7.00 am for about a week after the social unrest and then was set from 9.00 pm to 5.00 am every day, forcing to shut down all public activities during the evening).

When the health crisis started in Chile in March 2020, most festivals were still trying to recover from the consequences of the *Estallido* or planning their postponed edition. The *Frontera Sur, Festival Internacional de Cine de No Ficción* (Southern Frontier, Non-Fiction Film Festival) in Concepción, for example, was initially going to take place in November 2019, and after getting canceled, it was supposed to be held in April 2020. It was then canceled for a second time due to lockdown restrictions and finally took place in September 2020. In this third attempt, the festival was transformed into a fully online event and maintained a similar program, although workshops, Q&As sessions, and masterclasses with international guests were moved to Zoom meetings and streamed via Facebook Live.

In this chapter, we will examine how the Covid-19 crisis has further affected Chilean film festivals and posed new challenges for them. As Marijke de Valck and Antoine Damiens have pointed out in their co-edited dossier on film festivals and the first wave of Covid-19 (2020), the extent of the epidemiological crisis can only be tackled if we consider other social, economic, and political crises that impact contemporary festivals, often precipitating and accentuating previous trends affecting film circulation and exhibition. Thus, we should understand this crisis within a particular

historical context that has been pressuring onsite exhibitions and collective viewing since earlier, and festivals' responses as adaptive strategies that might surpass the current public health conditions.

This chapter provides an overview of how Covid-19 has affected film festivals' position in Chile and their strategies of survival. We mapped and tracked festivals' activities throughout 2020 and 2021 and used online ethnographic methods to observe some cases more closely (Postill and Pink 2012) by analyzing festivals' websites and social media, conducting participant observation of online activities, and interviewing festival organizers. We looked at some of the mechanisms through which festival practitioners adapted to the challenges they were facing, particularly how they temporarily became online events and began to change their organization and practices. We address some of the new ways in which film festivals have developed to engage with their audiences while moving to online platforms in 2020, which poses some questions on the future developments of these events.

CHILEAN FESTIVALS UNDER COVID-19

Only 59 of the previous 101 Chilean film festivals took place in 2020. There were 60 festival events (this account includes the Santiago Mountain Film Festival that was held twice in 2020, onsite and online), most of them (51) in a digital format. Nine of them took place normally before the Covid-19 outbreak, among them traditional summer festivals such as the *CINELEBU*, *Festival Internacional de Cine de Lebu* (Lebu International Film Festival), and the *FECICH*, *Festival de Cine Chileno* (Chilean Film Festival), in addition to newer ones such as the *Festival Internacional de Cine de Puerto Montt* (Puerto Montt International Film Festival). However, most of them had to be canceled or postponed.

The first festival to be canceled in 2020 was the *FEMCINE*, *Festival de Cine de Mujeres* (Women's Film Festival). *FEMCINE* was going to take place on March 17th–22nd, but the pandemic was officially declared in Chile through a sanitary alert on February 8th (Minister of Health 2020a), and on March 18th, the country was declared under state of emergency (Minister of Interior and Public Security 2020). From March 25th on, starting with the capital city, different cities and regions began their lockdown and increased restrictions on people's gatherings (Minister of Health 2020b). After this cancellation, the Chilean festival circuit halted for about two months.

It was not until June that established festivals began to re-emerge in online formats, for instance, the *Festival de Cine Europeo* (European Film Festival) and the indigenous children's film festival *Festival Pichikeche*. Festivals that typically take place during the first semester had to move their schedule, most of them to the second semester, concentrating on the months of October (6), November (14), and December (13). For example, the *Festival Internacional de Animación Chilemonos* (Animation International Film Festival Chilemonos) was moved from May to October. Most festivals that are usually held in the second semester (June to December) kept their annual slots. For example, the *FECILS*, *Festival Internacional de Cine de La Serena* (La Serena International Film Festival) and the *FICValdivia*, *Festival Internacional de Cine de Valdivia* (Valdivia International Film Festival) kept their October slot, while the *Festival de Películas Nativas Arica Nativa* (Arica Native Film Festival), the *ANTOFACINE*, *Festival Internacional de Cine de Antofagasta* (Antofagasta International Film Festival), and the *FICIQQ*, *Festival Internacional de Cine de Iquique* (Iquique International Film Festival) kept their slots in November.

Some festivals only slightly changed their calendar, such as the *FICVIÑA*, *Festival Internacional de Cine de Viña del Mar* (Viña del Mar International Film Festival), and the *ArqFilmFest*, *Arquitectura Film Festival* (Architecture Film Festival), which were moved to November (just a few weeks after their original slot in September and October). Only a few moved their calendar forward: the *Festival Internacional de Cine de No Ficción*, *Frontera Sur* (Nonfiction international Film Festival, Southern Frontier) (November to September), the *Santiago Horror Film Festival* (October to September), and the *FESCIES*, *Festival Nacional de Cine de Estudiantes Secundarios* (National High School Film Festival) (December to October) (see Table 7.1).

Festivals needed to adapt to the current situation by reshaping their program and their activities, reorganizing their team, reconfiguring their alliances, and redirecting the remaining funds from 2019 to different expenditures in 2020 (e.g., instead of using funds for paying international guests' plane tickets and accommodations, festivals paid streaming platforms). The main decision was whether to hold live events, at least in hybrid format, or move fully online. Both strategies involved restructuring their normal practices, as well as different challenges and opportunities.

Table 7.1 “Chilean film festivals after Covid-19 (2020)”

<i>Festival</i>	<i>Date 2019</i>	<i>Date 2020</i>	<i>Format</i>
Amor Festival Internacional de Cine LGBT+	June	July	Online
Arquitectura Film Festival—ArqFilmFest	October	November	Online
CineZ en Talcadáveres Festival Internacional Cine	November	December	Online
Terror y Fantástico Talca			
Cortos En Grande	November	November	Online
CUTÚN el Festival Internacional de Cine de Terror y	NA	September	Online
Fantasia de LA SERENA			
Festival Cine UC	May	September	Online
Festival de Animación Emergente	October	October	Online
Festival de Animación Nochedemonos	November	November	Online
Festival de Cine de Montaña Lo Valdés	April	November	On site
Festival de Cine de Mujeres—FEMCINE	March	August	Online
Festival de Cine de Terror de Valdivia	May	July	Online
Festival de Cine en Red—RED	NA	September	Online
Festival de Cine Europeo	May	June	Online
Festival de Cine Nacional e Internacional FELINA	October	December	Online
Festival de Cine Online de Chile—UDLAFestoc	December	December	Online
Festival de Cine Social y Antisocial—FECISO	August	November	On site
Festival en cuarentena	NA	April	Online
Festival Inclusivo de Arte	NA	October	Online
Festival Internacional Biobío Cine	April	June	Online
Festival Internacional Cine de Terror Valparaíso	December	December	Online
Festival Internacional de Animación Chilemonos	May	October	Online
Festival Internacional de Cine Arica Nativa	November	November	Online
Festival Internacional de Cine de Iquique—FICIQQ	November	November	Online
Festival internacional de Cine de La Serena—FECILS	October	October	Online
Festival Internacional de Cine de No Ficción, Frontera Sur	November	September	Online
Festival Internacional de Cine de Quillota	May	December	Online
Festival Internacional de Cine de Rengo—FECIR	September	December	Online
Festival Internacional de Cine de Surf	December	December	Online
Festival Internacional de Cine de Terror de Atacama	October	December	Online
Festival Internacional de Cine de Valdivia—FICValdivia	October	October	Online
Festival	September	November	Online
Internacional de Cine de Viña del Mar—FICVIÑA			
Festival Internacional de Cine Documental	September	September	Online
DocsValparaíso			
Festival	November	November	Online
Internacional de Cine en Antofagasta—ANTOFACINE			
Festival Internacional de Cine para Niños, Niñas y	August	August	Online
Adolescentes Ojo de Pescado			

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

<i>Festival</i>	<i>Date 2019</i>	<i>Date 2020</i>	<i>Format</i>
Festival Internacional de Cine Recobrado	December	November	Hybrid
Festival Internacional de Cine y Documental Musical—IN-EDIT Chile	April	December	Hybrid
Festival Internacional de Cortometrajes Vitacura	NA	December	Online
Festival	December	November	Hybrid
Internacional de Documentales de Santiago—FIDOCs			
Festival Itinerante de Cortometrajes La Ventana	November	December	Online
Festival Nacional de Cine de Estudiantes	December	October	Online
Secundarios—FECIES			
Festival Pichikeche	June	June	Online
Festival Proceso de Error	September	December	Online
Festival The CortOZ	November	November	Online
Final Girls Chile Festival de Cine Fantástico	NA	November	Online
Muestra Cine+Video Indígena	June	August	Online
Resistencia Film Fest	October	December	Online
Santiago Festival Internacional de Cine—SANFIC	August	August	Online
Santiago Horror Film Festival	October	September	Online
Santiago Mountain Film Festival	January	November	Online
Santiago Wild Film Festival	NA	March	Online
Todos somos diferentes. Concurso Internacional de Cortometrajes de Inclusión	April	July	Online

Data compiled from original research by the authors. Festivals appear in alphabetical order

LIVE EVENTS AND HYBRID STRATEGIES

After the pandemic hit, only two festivals were held entirely as live events, remaining consistent with their curatorial line and political stance: the *Festival de Cine de Montaña Lo Valdés* (Lo Valdés Mountain Film Festival) and the *FECISO, Festival de Cine Social y Antisocial* (Social and Antisocial Film Festival). The Mountain Film Festival was held fully onsite in order to respect its focus on nature and a healthy lifestyle. This outdoor festival took place in Lo Valdés, Cajón del Maipo (a canyon near Santiago), on two dates, November 21st–22nd and 27th–29th, with heavy restrictions and protocols. *FECISO* was held open-air on November 28th in Santiago's outskirts. *FECISO* is an openly contracultural and politically oriented festival that normally holds open-air activities in impoverished neighborhoods in the city's periphery; therefore, this gesture was in line with its organization while also reinforcing the social movement's idea of claiming the streets for the common people and standing against political repression.

Only three other festivals included some live events in their program, although they mainly took place online: the *Festival Internacional de Documentales de Santiago—FIDOCS* (Santiago International Documentary Film Festival), the *Festival Internacional de Cine y Documental Musical—IN-EDIT* (International Film and Musical Documentary Festival), and the archival film festival *Festival Internacional de Cine Recobrado de Valparaíso* (Valparaíso Recovered Cinema Film Festival). *FIDOCS* had a special screening of Patricio Guzmán's *La Cordillera de los Sueños* (2020) outside the theaters at the Ramón Cruz Park (Villa Frei, Santiago); *IN-EDIT* held its opening night and some screenings at their usual spot, the Nescafé de las Artes Theater, with heavy audience restrictions.

The case of *Cine Recobrado* deserves more attention, since it held a larger number of live activities, with some films being exhibited online and a parallel conference via Zoom. Other screenings of the festival took place on site in Valparaíso (open-air and drive-in exhibitions) during November and December when there were fewer sanitary restrictions.³ *Cine Recobrado* scheduled two open-air sidebars: “Cine en Tu Ventana” (Cinema at Your Window), with 16-mm film projections in different neighborhoods of the city of Valparaíso, and an “Autocinema” that emulated a 1950s drive-in cinema and showed classic B-movies and musicals. For the Autocinema, *Cine Recobrado* made an alliance with the Valparaíso Cultural Park, offering very limited tickets and a full nostalgic experience with popcorn and vintage movies, which proved to be a huge success: for the first time, this quite niche festival had a waiting list to get a spot at the festival's screenings, and it was fully booked every night. Both live activities aimed to recover not only classical cinema (the focus of the festival) but also more traditional cinema-going practices. We can see that, although exceptional, these live festival events incorporated some new opportunities that might be the way to go for this festival in the future.

FESTIVALS MOVING ONLINE

The rest of the Chilean festivals mostly relied on external online platforms (especially Festhome, used by 12 Festivals, but also Festival Scope [3] and Facebook [5]). Only 13 of them created their own screening

³FIDOCS from November 25 to December 1, In-Edit from December 2 to 8, and Cine Recobrado from November 28 to December 11.

platforms. In general, curating practices for these festivals proved to be more difficult than in previous years. Many films dropped because of the delay in the festival calendar, which clashed with the commercial premiere of the films. In the case of *FEMCINE*, for example, the decision to make it an online festival resulted in changing its date to August 4th–9th, 2020, and adapting its program and parallel activities to the new formats. In August, they showed 51 of the 68 films originally programmed. The major change was the cancelation of the opening film, the premiere of the Chilean film *Lina de Lima* (María Paz González, 2020), which was substituted by the American documentary *Be Natural: The Untold Story of Alice Guy-Blaché* (Pamela B. Green, 2018). Most festivals had to concentrate on fewer film premieres than in other years and to renegotiate with distributors in order to make some popular films available. Programming was also challenging for small regional festivals that would not normally have premiers in their programs but aimed to reach local audiences with limited access to theaters. Now they had to rethink their target outside their city of origin and face the opportunity to create a program that could be watched by the entire country while also losing their closeness with their local community.

On the other hand, going online also meant unexpected opportunities. Festivals experiencing economic issues could take place in an online form, such as the *Festival Internacional de Cine Documental DocsValparaíso* (DocsValparaíso International Documentary Festival), which re-emerged in 2020 after having been previously canceled due to lack of funds. RED, the association of 26 Chilean festivals, also managed to get some extra direct funding from the Chilean government to create an online festival with the collaboration of all the festivals in the association, called *Festival de Cine en Red*—RED (Network Film Festival), which showed films with a multicultural focus on local communities. While it is not clear whether the festival will have some continuity, RED helped festival workers and practitioners who had been quite affected by the economic crisis due to the pandemic, providing them with some income in 2020 and therefore covering for the lack of emergency plans and state policies for the cultural sector during the pandemic.

In addition, a few festivals like *FEMCINE*, *FECICH*, and *FIDOCS* extended the screening time of their films for a couple of weeks (even when they stopped interacting with their audiences after the official dates of the festivals were over). Most festivals also expanded the event by adding more online activities, such as filmmakers' seminars, talks by special

guests, and other educational activities. Moreover, festivals that would not normally be able to get many renowned guests to participate took the opportunity to invite international names that otherwise would not have been able to attend the event. *Arica Nativa* had an online conversation with German director Werner Herzog, and *FICVIÑA* with the Argentinian actor Ricardo Darín and the Uruguayan director Mario Handler.

Two festivals saw an opportunity to seize the online experience as an immediate response to the pandemic, though it is unsure whether they will continue using these online components. The first version of the *Festival de Cine de Vida Salvaje y Medio Ambiente Santiago Wild* (Santiago Wild Animal Life and Environmental Film Festival), originally scheduled as an onsite event in December 2019, was moved to March due to the *Estallido*, when it was canceled again because of the pandemic. It rapidly went online through a national streaming platform of the Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage, called *Ondamedia* (which was used for festival screenings for the first time), releasing its films on the platform for free. Another new festival was the Festival en Cuarentena Chile (Quarantine in Chile Film Festival) which aimed specifically at very short films (*nanofilms*) created during the pandemic.

Despite these unexpected opportunities, changing to an “online event” was a difficult task for organizers. The virtualization of festivals meant transforming, to a certain extent, the very nature of each event, or at least the nature organizers were used to. Practitioners had to change their ways of working, their know-how, and some of their professional alliances. They were pushed to learn new ways of producing, organizing, and communicating around their events and to create new expertise that challenged their previous professional experience. This affected their relationship with filmmakers, distributors, and other actors in the field, and it also altered their relationship with the audience, which had become more “invisible” and unpredictable than before.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND GATEKEEPING PRACTICES

Increasing their audiences has been one of the main challenges for Chilean festivals in recent years. It has also been one of the main issues to be resolved under Covid-19 restrictions. Would their regular audiences be able to “attend” the online version of the festival? Would they want to watch festival films from home? What could the festival provide that was

different from the growing digital audiovisual offer people could find online? And would people be interested in watching even more screen time during the prolonged lockdown and teleworking periods?

Most festivals assumed that their main goal was making films accessible to their regular audiences. In the beginning, several festivals experienced technical problems and kept getting complaints on social media. Thus, they invested their efforts in the quality of the streaming platforms, aiming to ensure their usability. Earlier concerns were getting an online platform for free and making enough films from their original program available to their audiences. Organizers later learned they also needed to improve online accessibility by making platforms understandable and that they could not assume the audiences' literacy about streaming. Audiences could get impatient and frustrated, and abandon their viewing quite quickly, so festivals stopped uploading information to their main webpage and reinforced their use of social media, where they provided daily information about the program and upcoming online events. They also reassured the audiences by explaining certain procedures and giving away viewing instructions through both their websites and social media (e.g., on whether it was necessary to sign up and how to create an account).

This shows that film festival audiences are not necessarily used to online viewing and that even when they are used to watching VOD platforms such as Netflix or Amazon Prime, this knowledge is not immediately transferable to other platforms, especially those that are less user-friendly. The aforementioned *Frontera Sur*, for instance, created a YouTube video with an explanation on "How to watch our films" that was embedded in its website and promoted through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, despite the fact that it is mostly a cinephile-oriented festival whose audiences are normally highly educated filmmakers, film students, scholars, and film critics, whom one would expect to be familiarized with online viewing practices. The festival made an effort to "educate" their audiences in these new practices, explaining different ways to attend the event in order to provide a smooth experience and replicate their attendance and normal consumption patterns.

In addition to the re-education of their audiences, guiding the viewing experience also aimed to communicate the festivals' program and its sections more clearly in order to stand out among the overwhelming audiovisual offer that became available online. *Frontera Sur* helped audiences to navigate through its website by also explaining its categories and curatorial criteria, which aimed to facilitate decision-making on which films to watch.

In previous years, its catalog was less detailed than in 2020, when it also increased its parallel activities, organizing more talks with its audience and expanding the use of social media to recommend and explain its movies. We can see that the festival assumed its position as a cinephiles' guide more clearly, retaining its status of gatekeeper in the local field, which previously relied solely on its program and face-to-face interactions during the event (and therefore in more informal and spontaneous ways).

Practices like the ones described above allowed audiences to trust the festival's programmers and relax throughout the selection process, which is arguably one of the advantages festivals will keep in the future. While it is true that audiences can have access to more films and information and they do not depend on a particular festival to watch the films they want, festivals could still have a role to play as cultural mediators of audiovisual consumption. Amid the increasing VODs and online audiovisual offers, festivals can still filter and provide significant recommendations for spectators, helping them to find their way in this new virtual context. Interactions with film critics and wider audiences via social media (particularly Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) or even by phone helped to mediate with the audience and communicate the festival's stance, reassuring viewers about the reliability of its particular viewpoint.

THE PARADOX OF ONLINE ACCESS

Chilean festivals learned this type of practice by observing each other. As put by a practitioner, "At that stage [August–October 2021], all festivals were observing, viewing each other's films, and checking what was happening, what was working for them."⁴ Thus, 2020 can be understood as a year of trial and error, with learning outcomes that would probably impact the festivals' future versions, particularly those related to online viewing. That is the case of *FEMCINE*, the first one to cancel its live event. In its 2020 online version, films could only be watched for a limited time, something that sparked some tension among audiences who wanted unlimited access. It also meant that several "tickets" (number of viewings for a film that the festival had already bought from its distributors) were lost because audiences did not manage to watch it within its time frame. As a result, in the new online version of March 2021, *FEMCINE* decided to negotiate

⁴ Personal communication, female practitioner, February 2021. In Spanish in the original, translated by the authors.

with distributors in order to grant full access to the movies any day of the festival until the total number of tickets ran out. The festival realized that it could not organize films by day slots the same way they did onsite, since spectators simply did not have the time to watch many films, even if theoretically they could do it from the comfort of their homes.

One of the paradoxes that emerged from online viewing is that even though films are more accessible, they are not necessarily easier to watch. While it is true that festivals increase the films' general access, there are other barriers that the live festival experience used to ease. On the one hand, online festivals are more accessible, as there are not as many geographical limitations to get into festival venues and there is more flexibility regarding the films' starting time. Also, Chilean festivals were mostly free to watch if one signed up to their website (even festivals for which one would have paid onsite, such as *FICValdivia*). However, on the other hand, home viewing has other limitations, such as stable and reliable Internet access, access to a screen, and time to connect during the day.

The pandemic has revealed the extent to which social inequalities prevent adequate access to online entertainment. We need to consider that even when 87.4% of Chilean homes have Internet access, only 56% have home Internet service, and even then its quality is not always adequate (SUBTEL 2017). This particularly affects impoverished, rural, and semi-rural communities.⁵ Moreover, gender inequalities have also impacted online viewing, as women have consistently reported a decrease in their free time during the pandemic as a result of looking after their children and/or the elderly and doing household chores.⁶ In this sense, online festivals by themselves could not increase accessibility to film viewing, and they might even reproduce structural inequalities. Additionally, the political and economic crisis in Chile put more stress on households' socioeconomic conditions, including those of professionals in an educational and cultural sector (an important target for film festivals) that had already been particularly affected by cancellations and curfews since the *Estallido*.

Amid these conditions, festivals could not provide a space for relaxation, social connection, and communal access to movies as they used to.

⁵ Data considering family income is quite revealing: while 75% of higher-income homes have broadband, only 46% of mid-income and 24% of low-income homes access broadband (SUBTEL 2020).

⁶ A study revealed that 38% of men spent zero hours in household chores and 71% spent zero hours looking after their children (Alonso 2020).

As the time-space delimitations of the event were lost, the “festival space” was no longer protected from the outside world anymore. Particularly for women, festivals were juxtaposed with everyday life and multiple online and offline chores. Going online ended both the material and symbolic boundaries of the festival space, and thus, the possibility of disconnecting from everyday duties and constant stress. Its rhythm was blurred with everyday life, breaking the temporal exceptionality created by the festival and leaving cinema-going unprotected from the mundane. One of the charms of attending a festival is its intensity, structured on the experience lived by the participants (Harbord 2016) and often achieved through the ritual separation from normal life, living an exceptional routine that disrupts the quotidian. Being at home, interrupted by families, homeschooling, work meetings, noisy neighbors, and food delivery both impeded and deromanticized the festival experience, limiting audiences’ participation. We see that since online activities are constantly entwined with offline events, we cannot assume that virtualization by itself will increase the films’ accessibility. Although sometimes they seem to be separated spheres, online and offline experiences are related to each other, as part of the same social continuum and as an integral part of everyday life (Miller and Slater 2000; Coleman 2010). Therefore, mediated social spaces should be understood as rooted in people’s offline routines.

In addition, going online limited communal viewing in public exhibition spaces, which affected local festivals in different ways. For festivals that heavily rely on both cinephilia and social networking, this overlapping offline and online experience is more difficult to overcome. For cinephile-oriented festivals, the ritual separation from the quotidian is rooted in the festivals’ identity and is an important condition for the participation of audiences who, as Bazin famously suggested (1955), are more devoted to this new “religious order” of communal cinema-going and social gatherings around films. In the case of the *FICValdivia—Festival Internacional de Cine de Valdivia* (Valdivia International Film Festival), arguably the most important festival for Chilean cinephiles, the organizers’ expectations seemed to clash with the harsh realities of online watching. From the very beginning, *FICValdivia* was reluctant to cancel live activities, until they officially announced the festival would be fully online just a month before it was due, in October (FICValdivia 2020).

This is a key event in the local calendar (González Itier 2020), with film professionals, critics, academics, and students traveling from different parts of the country every year to meet in the southern city of Valdivia.

Breaking this tradition was as difficult for the organizers as it was for the audiences, and there were quite some expectations about what would happen—in fact, in several interviews and talks, the festival's director Raúl Camargo had to reassure that *FICValdivia* would take place in some form or another. The reluctance to change the essence of the festival rite reflected on the original idea that online films had to be organized at certain times, replicating the programming grid and therefore the pleasure of organizing oneself to watch several films a day and being prepared to be immersed in the festival experience. The circumstances at home, however, made this quite difficult, and very soon after the beginning of the festival, *FICValdivia* had to explain to its audiences (via email, as well as on its website and its social media) that they could actually watch the films at different times until tickets were sold out. This recognition made evident that the full-time cinephile festival experience was no longer possible under online circumstances.

In the case of smaller regional festivals that were not so focused on expert cinemagoers and film professionals but heavily based on the relationship with local cinemagoers, the replacement of the live event was also problematic. These festivals could no longer offer something otherwise unreachable for their audience (access to different films), and their audiences were not always easy to engage online, either because they lacked a good Internet connection or because they were not used to it. In the case of the *FECICH Festival de Cine Chileno* (Chilean Film Festival), which is based in the small towns of Quilpué and Villa Alemana, going online in January 2021 was quite a challenge. An important part of its audience consists of older people who either do not have proper Internet access or are not familiar with social media or streaming platforms. These audiences would normally get closer to the event because of its physical presence downtown, in Quilpué's *Teatro Juan Bustos Ramírez* and Villa Alemana's *Teatro Pompeya*, local theaters with which they have a close relationship. Curfews, lockdowns, and other health restrictions made it very difficult to publicize the festival in the streets and make door-to-door invitations, as *FECICH* organizers would normally do. The festival needed to reinvent its ways to reach its audiences and educate them on the use of online devices.

TACTICS FOR ENGAGING AUDIENCES ONLINE

Despite these difficulties, several festivals report that online attendance (meaning the total number of film viewings) was similar to that offline, although it is still difficult to jump to conclusions, as platforms cannot accurately report on viewing conditions and the actual number of people watching full films. Some online activities also managed to bring interesting surprises. For example, in the case of *FECICH*, the festival moved its “Escuela de espectadores” (School of Spectators) to Zoom, an audience development activity consisting of classes about Chilean cinema taught by a film critic. Although fewer people attended every session in comparison to previous years, these classes increased the age diversity of their participants, stimulating social interaction and an intergenerational dialogue among the festival’s captive audiences. *FECICH* also created a new series of seminars with the elderly via Zoom in alliance with an organization for senior citizens. These sessions activated dialogue and a sense of community among these *FECICH* cinemagoers, despite their age and distance. And while the festival was very concerned with the virtualization of its screenings, the older audiences reacted much more positively than organizers expected. The festival’s director Sebastián Cartajena comments:

It came up in conversations [with the audience] that the elderly actually felt, if not ‘safer’, at least engaged with the digital format (I imagine it was the case for those that have Internet access at home)... because platforms are easier to use if you send them a link with the movie: they just need to click... and that made access so much easier for older people! Many of them suggested we keep a digital film program in the future because they managed to watch many more things. They overcome their problems with mobility, their economic issues, their problems with catching public transport, safety issues ... so I think this is a specific group to work with by combining two strategies, online and offline, in the future. (Personal interview, our translation)

The festivals’ new tactics for engaging with their audiences involved a continuous learning process and reflection on film festivals. To keep some sense of community and their role in audience creation—which is also a

requirement for obtaining government funds⁷—most festivals tried to adapt their previous sidebar sections to the online format, with relative success. *FEMCINE*, for example, was the first festival to organize talks in Zoom and stream them via its Facebook account, surprisingly getting a similar or higher attendance than the one they used to get in the live event. These sidebars became a space for live interactions with audiences even outside the Zoom meeting, who would “reappear” through their comments and reactions (likes and hearts) in real time via Facebook, including their questions to the participants. This gave a sense of presence that mere “likes” on social media do not manage to fulfill. As Facebook shows how many people are watching at the same time and the chat is changing along with the streaming, it recreates some sense of communal viewing through specific “socialites” or qualities of social relationships. Even with its obvious limitations, this helped to feel some of the social connection missing from the online festival experience, expanding an isolated relationship with the event, and therefore, the festival experience.

For *FEMCINE* in particular, one of the benefits of being the first festival to try this format was also the novelty of this practice, which was received with enthusiasm in the midst of the long 2020 lockdown. The subsequent festivals, however, were not so lucky. As online talks proliferated and spectators became more and more used to the format, enthusiasm declined and not all of them were as successful unless they managed to clearly differentiate the events from others. For example, *Cine Recobrado* organized an academic symposium on Terence Fisher via Zoom on a different date from the live event while also targeting different audiences. This attracted a steady niche audience and even worked better than in previous years, as the festival could congregate scholars and students from different parts of South America that would normally not have the money to travel to Chile for the event. In addition, other film festivals continued to develop some techniques to engage the audiences more effectively, such as using the much more visually appealing StreamYard instead of Zoom for their parallel activities.

Chilean film festivals are still lacking strategies for further congregating their audiences and sharing their viewing experiences. We have not

⁷In recent years, the Chilean State has stressed the importance of audience creation and development. Thus, as of 2018, funds for the organization of film festivals started to include “audience creation” as part of their requirements for financing. For further details on this issue, see Peirano (2021).

observed activities in which audiences can interact with each other more freely and where the conversation is not mediated by festival organizers. For example, they do not use platforms that recreate communal viewing along the lines of *Watch2Gether* (a platform that allows for two or more people to watch the same content at the same time over the Internet) or *Mymovies.it* used by Bologna and Pordenone film festivals in Italy, a database for national films that turned into a platform for watching cinema on demand where audiences could make live commentaries on each movie.

All in all, replacing live interactions and expanding the festival experience has been one of the main issues for local festivals going online. Since the biggest concern was film programming and smooth streaming, festivals could often forget to keep their close relationship with their audiences alive. The Chilean festivals that managed to overcome the first year of Covid-19 were those that recognized that they were much more than yet another online viewing platform with an interesting curating viewpoint. First and foremost, festivals are social events that foster communities among cinephiles or local cinemagoers, and they tried to recreate an online community as much as they could. As Hobbins-White and Limov (2020) suggest, staging an event online and preserving the “energy” of onsite interaction is very difficult. And even with the technology that enables both approximating real-time and live engagement for geographically dispersed audiences, it requires a major investment and commitment from festival practitioners.

CONCLUSIONS: THE FUTURE OF GOING ONLINE

Given the recent global transformations due to Covid-19 and the impact of the economic and political crisis on Chilean festivals since the *Estallido*, it is difficult to see how they are going to go back to “normal” any time soon. Considering the precarious conditions of the Chilean film festival landscape due to the unstable health context and the pressing economic conditions, which push them to maintain a cheaper virtual format, chances are that Chilean film festivals will continue to be held partially online. In 2021, the conditions remain similar, with cycles of restrictions on people’s mobility in lockdowns, curfew times, limitations for opening movie theaters, and capacity controls. *FICValdivia* announced another online version in June 2021, informing their audiences that only if the health

conditions improve, they might also exhibit its program onsite (FICValdivia 2021).

Based on the Chilean festivals' experiences analyzed in this chapter, we can speculate that in the future, these festivals will probably opt for some hybrid form, retaining a few public screenings mixed with several online activities. On the one hand, the pandemic made the possibilities for incorporating online technologies to festival life, reducing geographical boundaries, and increasing films' accessibility for certain groups evident. Talks and seminars via Zoom and/or other apps are also likely here to stay, as they considerably reduce the costs of bringing directors, juries, and other film professionals to local festivals while maintaining their international outlook. As films' international accessibility and circulation also keep accelerating, the internationalization of local festivals seems more affordable than ever.

On the other hand, face-to-face interactions continue to be vital for film festivals, particularly for key events in the local industry and those more cinephile-orientated, in which social networking is important. Live events are also more relevant to festivals that work closely with local communities and grassroots organizations, which have a direct impact on their territories. Even if one would expect festivals with lower budgets to prefer to go online for good, that is not the case for festivals that take place in places without a reliable Internet connection or with audiences that are still not used to an online viewing platform. And while it is true that both audiences and organizers are quickly learning about these new forms of festival-going, the festival live experience has not been successfully replaced yet, and it might never be. Not only do festivals need to implement new strategies to re-engage with their audiences more actively, but there is also exhaustion from online overconnectivity, an overwhelming offer of audiovisual content at home, and no time or no ideal conditions for "attending" a festival at home.

The latter opens the question of future places for interaction with the audiences and ways of expanding the sense of community with festivals, including whether it is possible to foster online festival communities and the extent to which they can create similar patterns to onsite events. It also poses the question about the nature and configuration of those audiences. Are they the same ones that engage with the live event? How are the audiences segmented, and how are they relating to the festival? Apart from some modest quantitative research, until now, festival organizers in Chile have mostly relied on direct observation to build some knowledge about their audiences. Without seeing their faces, it becomes more difficult to

grasp who these audiences are and to get a sense of their relationship with the event. More than ever, this is a moment for festivals to rethink their identities and understand their reach better, as well as rethink the type of audiences they have and those they are aiming for. Thus, it is a moment to look deeper into their audiences' diversity and design specific ways to interact with them online and onsite. This is also a challenge for scholars and researchers because no matter how much quantitative data can be easily compiled online, it is not possible to actually "see" the audience, except through the traces they leave on social media comments and Zoom gatherings. There is a need to develop new tools that help understand the festivals' relationship with their audiences in the future, both online and offline.

Acknowledgments This work was supported by the Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo ANID [Fondecyt n.1211594]. The authors wish to thank the festival organizers and colleagues who have shared their experiences and generously helped us to think through festivals during these strange times. We also thank the editors for their insightful comments and suggestions over this piece.

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