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# Conecta Fiction 2019: 10 Takeaways

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MADRID — The 3rd Conecta Fiction, Europe's biggest Latin American TV co-production forum, wrapped last week in Pamplona after four days of dealing, debate and gastronomic delectation. Following 10 Takeaways from an intense and buoyant event, driven by the unfaltering growth of high-end production in Spain and most of Latin America:

## 1.PLATFORM PIVOT

The writing was on the wall, or more precisely the big screen of an auditorium at Pamplona's luxurious Baluarte congress center, from the get-go of Conecta Fiction. Drama and mini-series production near tripled in Germany over 2014-18, according to Spain's Gabinete de Estudios de la Comunicación Audiovisual (GECA). It near doubled in France last year, up to 27 titles, from 13 in 2017. Yet traditional TV viewing is still falling among young audiences, down 28.4% and 20.1% among 14-12s and 13-24s in Spain, for example, said GECA's Luis de Zubiaurre Wagner, citing Kantar Media. The real money shot was a statistic for how much traditional TV young people in the U.K. watch on their tablets and smart-phones: Just 3 minutes a day, or 6% of a 54 minute total. This context dominated Conecta Fiction. More and more of the news flow or content on display, sometimes presented before at the L.A. Screenings, was from companies dealing with streaming platforms, such as Chile's Parox, which has bowed "En Terapia" on Telefonica's Latin American cellphone service Movistar Play, or companies looking to create premium content for platforms, such as Ecuador's Touché Films, which is looking to create a slate of premium TV series, leveraging its comedy sketch YouTube channel, Enchufe.TV, Latin America's biggest.

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## 2.VIACOM INTERNATIONAL STUDIOS: THE BIG PUSH

For executives and press at Conecta Fiction which did not attend the Century City presentation of Viacom International Studios on Day 4 of the L.A. Screenings, DarioTurovelzky's presentation at Conecta Fiction surprised for the power of its trailers. Turovelzky used the occasion at Pamplona to send out a clear call that VIS was highly interested in "going beyond our own brands" to produce across a wide range of formats, partnering with other production forces. Presented at the first Conecta Fiction, "El Regreso de Lucas," co-produced by broadcaster Telefe, part of Viacom Intl. Media Networks Americas , was "the beginning of working with different alliances over the world, developing and producing content in the world," Turovelzky said.

"Europe, for Viacom International Studios, is a key element," he added. VIS UK and VIS Madrid were created "to maximize our power of combined production," Turovelzky continued. The projects Turovelzky presented in Pamplona were, not by chance, those made partnering with other companies, or underscoring VIS capacity to produce abroad: "To Catch a Thief," a series shot by Viacom in Buenos Aires and Barcelona, written by one of Spain's foremost TV creators, Javier Olivares, and topping Spanish TV star Alexandra Jiménez ("Los Serrano"). Trailers featured in Pamplona were made with other production partners: "Victoria Small," Daniel Burman's daily scripted comedy drama co-developed with The Mediapro Studio; "Bad People," co-produced with "La Casa de Papel" producers Atresmedia; "Red Dot," a fantasy romantic thriller produced in Spain; "Spirit House," originated by "Final Destination" creator Jeffrey Reddick, and produced with Convergence Entertainment; "Before I Forget," a reversion from Turkey's Ay Yapim.

### **3. DISNEY: THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME**

"Monzón," a chronicle of Argentine boxer Carlos Monzón trial for murder of his wife, Alicia Muniz, closed Conecta Fiction's prize ceremony this year, impressing for its high-end craft. What was equally impressive is that it was presented by Leonardo Aranguibel, the Disney executive who has spearheaded Disney's highly successful drive into what he calls "True Life Fiction" in Latin America. Meanwhile, Mariana Pérez, a driving force at Fox's original productions in Latin America, attended Conecta Fiction, having moved over from April 1 to join Aranguibel at Disney's new General Entertainment Production division, Latin America. Mergers give companies two things: the IP assets of another company, (and?) the talent, often on a prescribed time limit, of its top executives. It is good to see that two top executives talent in Latin America has not been lost in the Disney-Fox wash.

### **4. HBO: UPPING THE ANTE IN SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA**

HBO Latin America's Roberto Ríos and HBO España's Miguel Salvat gave a warmly-received keynote at Conecta Fiction, drilling down on their production slates. The event caught both in evolution. Ríos talked up a slate which included HBO Latin America's first Colombian scripted series ("Mil Colmillos") its first remake ("Hard"), its entry into fully-realized period adventure with "Santos Dumont," and "The American Guest" which represent its first series with dialog in French and English. Salvat talked a Pamplona audience through five new HBO España productions. At this time last year, he could only mention two: The one-off docu-series "Destino Rusia," which brought a character/story driven focus to the 2018 FIFA World Cup; and "Patria," a vision of the tragic impact on Basques of 50 years of armed conflict.



### **5.MEDIAPRO: YET MORE GROWTH**

Conecta Fiction saw Spanish multinational The Mediapro Studio host a presentation of new series “Malaka,” which it’s producing for Spanish broadcaster RTVE; have Viacom sneak-peek “To Catch a Thief,” showrun by Javier Olivares, now under exclusive contract as an executive producer at The Mediapro Studio; team with Argentina’s Non Stop for a bioseries on flamenco legend Lola Flores; and showcase its first Mediapro Chile drama series project, “The Cliff.” With Mediapro Chile, Mediapro, also a powerful sports rights broker and services company, has 58 offices spread around the world, 15 of them producing and developing contents. The number is unlikely to stop there.

### **6.CHILE: MEGA HAPPY**

Affirming that its biggest asset was its talent and capacity to create stories, Mega’s Juan Ignacio Vicente affirmed that Chile’s biggest broadcast network by market share was at Conecta Fiction not only to acquire programs but leverage its talent and production capacity to look for foreign producers in order to produce on an international scale. That looks set to open the door to production with broadcast partners, bringing in independent producers not only abroad but also in Chile, a move its independent TV sector was crying out for. Conecta Fiction took place as Movistar Play bowed the Parox-produced “En Terapia,” the first Chilean series to be acquired for a streaming platform. With Fabula moving into international TV production and Mediapro Chile unveiling its first original production in Pamplona, Chile’s independent TV production sector is coming together at a gallop.



## **7.NAVARRE**

“Navarre shall be the wonder of the world,” said King Ferdinand in Shakespeare’s “Love’s Labour’s Lost.” As it drives to persuade more international companies to make use of its tax credits, most probably via co-production with Spain, Navarre certainly delighted at Conecta Fiction with a Think Tank being held at the fairytale Royal Castle at Olite, having visited the badlands of Bardenas Reales National Park, the desert across which Daenerys leads the Dothraki in “Game of Thrones.”

But attracting foreign investment and knowhow via shoots is one thing. Navarre is also looking to encourage “organic growth of its domestic sector, and attraction of foreign investors for missing parts of the value chain,” Javier Lacunza, general manager of Navarre Culture, Sports and Leisure, said on the last day of Conecta Fiction.

Part of that can come through the expansion of Navarre’s animation and post-production services, he added. Nestling in the Baztán Valleys, Estudios Meliton opens its doors in July; both Apolo Films, with “D’Artacán y los Tres Mosqueperros,” and Dr. Platypus and Ms. Wombat are now producing animation out of Navarre. The two companies designed a fast-track six-month course to develop a local animation talent pool. Navarre development investor Sodena can help a company set up in Navarre. The region has now tweaked its fiscal incentives system to make it easier for producers and investors to benefit from its tax credit system, Lacunza added. Conecta Fiction helped give local producers a network of contacts which they can now activate in the months to come, said Pablo Iraburu, president of the Navarre Audiovisual Cluster (Clavna). For Navarre, another takeaway from the event was the collaboration of public and private sectors, Lacunza added.

## **8.THINK TANK CONCLUSIONS**

50 industry professionals from Europe and the America’s participated in a think tank program sponsored by Spain’s RTVE. On Tuesday morning the conclusions were summed up by Sophie Valais, legal advisor of the European Audio-visual Observatory and Concepción Cascajosa, director of the Film and TV Screenwriting master’s at Madrid’s Carlos III University. In short, the participants agreed that a willingness to evolve with consumer trends partnered with increased co-production activity are key to the survival of independent TV producers., In fact, they concluded, if current players embrace the creative freedom that a new Linear-OTT landscape. Short-form content meant for mobile devices, video game tie-ins and social media campaigns should no longer be a novelty but considered an integral part of any IP meant to appeal to younger generations. Echoed throughout the week, the Think Tank participants agreed that the way in which content consumption is tracked must be standardized and made more easily available in order to understand and predict trends. Finally, it was stated that advertising needs an overhaul. In Spain in particular, advertising revenues have never recovered since the 2008 financial crisis, and the Think Tank proposed that more ads are not the answer, but better and more expensive ads might be. Undoubtedly the participants took a lot home with them to think about.

**9.ASKING FOR TOOLS TO THRIVE IN AN UNPREDICTABLE FUTURE**

Spanish producer, entrepreneur and university professor José Miguel Contreras condensed his six-month long master's course on the history of the TV industry and its volatile and unpredictable nature into a forty-minute talk, moderated by Mandarina Producciones head of sales and intl. markets Gloria Saló. According to Contreras the greatest characteristic any independent producer can have is adaptability. Being small and agile is not, in his opinion, a detraction. Facing unbeatable global entities, a small producer needs to focus on the things larger companies can't do, i.e. finding stories through access to local communities. The big players will have to pay a premium for that type of service, best done with the aid of a local producer. He also argued that for local industry to survive, it needs legislative help, particularly in two areas: protecting content ownership and access to broadcast consumption data. He argues that knowledge is power, and when a company like Netflix can keep its consumer data private, they hold all the power.

**10.WHERE TO CONECTA FICTION?**

Pamplona proved, by common consent, a delight. Attendance was up 30% to 692 delegates, the question for Conecta Fiction director Geraldine Gonard was not how Conecta Fiction should grow but whether it was now too large. The answer from attendees was that it has to over expand. The event sparked a large clutch of announcements. Two were perhaps particularly significant:

On the first day of conferences, Argentina's Pol-ka revealed it had optioned "El cielo a tiros," the latest novel from "Rosario Tijeras" author, Colombian novelist Jorge Franco, which should become Pol-ka first production made totally outside Argentina, as it moves ever more into international business.

On the second day, Spanish pubcaster RTVE confirmed an open secret, that it would be producing "Inés of My Soul" with Chile's broadcast network Chilevisión, Spain's Lagardère-owned Boomerang TV and Amazon Prime Video securing exclusive streaming rights in the U.S., Spain and Latin America. A co-production of this type with a streaming platform acquiring distribution rights would have been unthinkable only five years ago. Latin America and Europe's TV sector is still evolving, in artistic and business terms. In such a context, attendance at such events as Conecta Fiction where new models are first revealed is all the more necessary.

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