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Mapping histories and archiving ephemeral landscapes: strategies and challenges for researching small film festivals

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ABSTRACT

Film festivals have had a strong impact on small cinemas, contributing to the dynamic trends of national fields of film production. Drawing on research experience of mapping Chilean film festivals for the first time, this article discusses the methods used to identify film festivals and to reconstruct their historical trajectories. The article explores the strategies used to assemble fragmented and dispersed historical data from written and oral sources, by using both archival and ethnographic approaches. Examining the Chilean case, which involves smaller, lesser known and under researched film festivals, aims to shed some light on the challenges involved in researching the ephemeral cultural landscapes created by film festivals in precarious contexts. The article argues that festivals' positioning as ever-present events means that they tend to lose their memories and have complicated relationships with their own pasts. This also has an impact on the ways in which we can study and understand the festival phenomenon. Researchers need to consider multiple methods and research strategies, involving a range of epistemological and ethical issues, which can both enrich and complicate film festival research.

KEYWORDS

Ethnography; archival research; mapping; film festivals; event studies; small cinemas

The landscape of Chilean film festivals has considerably changed since the creation of the first international film festival in 1967, the *Festival Internacional de Cine de Viña del Mar*,¹ an iconic event often associated with the beginning of the New Latin American Cinema movement of the period (Flores 2013; Román 2010; Francia 1990). After its closure throughout the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990),² only a very limited number of film festivals took place in Chile. These events were small exhibition platforms that served as an alternative to mainstream commercial cinemas. It was not until the early 1990s that festivals started to appear in Chilean cultural life, when some generalist, short and documentary film festivals were created,³ helping revitalise the national field of film production and opening up access to different forms of cinema for local audiences. The landscape of national festivals grew again in the second half of the 2000s, linked to the expansion of local film production. More and more festivals were created every year in every region of the country (particularly between 2014 and 2016),⁴ becoming more and more professional, specialised and internationalised.⁵ Despite this growth, most festivals exist in very difficult economic conditions and their continuity remains somewhat

uncertain. Chilean film festivals thus constitute an ever-changing landscape of cyclic events, which tend to form ephemeral cultural infrastructures.

Despite their temporary nature, festivals have had a strong impact on recent Chilean cinema (Peirano 2016), a 'small national cinema' (Hjort and Duncan 2007; Giukin, Falkowska, and Desser 2015) with an irregular level of production, a small domestic market and a strong dependence on support from the nation-state, as film production is largely governmentally subsidized (which is often the case for European and other world cinemas). There is a strong line of research on large international film festivals' impact on small film industries, particularly regarding their support to the production, distribution, circulation, and promotion of small national cinemas (Jordanova 2010; Falicov 2010; de Valck 2007). Less attention has been paid, however, to the role of less prestigious film festivals from small nations. These small festivals have also contributed to developing national 'fields' (Bourdieu 1993) of film production, helping to articulate their dynamic trends.

Aiming to map these events to further understand small cinemas presents several challenges. This article discusses the research process involved in mapping film festivals, analysing the methods used to identify local festivals and to reconstruct their historical trajectories. Drawing on the research experience of mapping Chilean film festivals for the first time, the article explores the strategies used to assemble fragmented and dispersed historical data from written and oral sources, by using both archival and ethnographic approaches. Examining this case aims to shed some light on the challenges involved in researching festival histories and mapping the ephemeral cultural landscapes created by film festivals in small nations (particularly in precarious contexts), allowing for a comparative perspective in film festivals research.

This article will argue that festivals' positioning as ever-present events has an impact not only on their constitution but also on the ways we can understand the festival phenomenon. We will see that festivals' tend to forget their memories and have complicated relationships with their own pasts,⁶ so that researchers need to consider multiple methods and research strategies, involving a range of epistemological and ethical issues, which can both enrich and complicate film festival research.

Constructing a field: what is a 'film festival' in Chile?

One of the main difficulties for researching local film festivals, particularly in regions that hold smaller or less prestigious events, is the lack of a consistent characterisation, that is to say, the systematisation of the data of their number, distribution and historical development in certain geographical areas. During my ethnographic fieldwork on the Chilean national field of film production (2011–2014),⁷ I found that this problem increasingly obstructed my research. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews with directors, producers, film critics and festival organisers, it soon became clear that festivals were the main sites not only for the exhibition and circulation of Chilean films, but also for the negotiation of cultural and aesthetic values and the fostering of social encounters between different agents in the field of film production (Peirano 2016). Despite their proliferation and growing importance, however, film festivals remained under-researched, and it was difficult to contrast first-hand qualitative data with information about their general development, which could have helped to understand their impact on national cinema.

Knowledge about local film festivals was yet to be systematised (González 2017), even when professionals' personal memories, oral references, festivals' promotion materials, websites and catalogues seemed to provide all sorts of sources for research, in order to get a sense of a common history of these events in Chile. In this context, it seemed that a sensible starting point for understanding local film festivals would be to produce an overview: systematising the available information and mapping the terrain. How many festivals existed, how many were created, where were they? How had they come to exist and how did they survive despite difficult economic conditions? What were they like, how similar (or not) were they to other festivals in the world?

The research project of mapping Chilean film festivals took place between 2017 and 2018, as the first part of a wider project I led during this period, which aimed to analyse festivals' increasing importance for the Chilean field of film production.⁸ This first stage involved the construction of a database of Chilean film festivals that allowed us to characterise them, identify local trends, and gain a more accurate overview of their geographical distribution and historical trajectories. The construction of this database also involved the creation of a digital archive from the available material on festivals, compiled both for this database and for future research focusing on individual cases. One of the main results of this stage was the creation of an online platform (www.festivalesde.cine.cl) that presents this overview on one site, giving broader audiences access to festivals' profiles and some of their unwritten histories.

The first problem that needed to be tackled was to find out how many festivals actually existed in Chile, both historically and at the time of the research. In 2017, there was an inventory available from the Council of Audiovisual Art and Industry (*Consejo del Arte y la Industria Audiovisual*, from 2018 part of the Ministry of Arts and Cultures) listing 52 events between festivals and film exhibitions, which we soon realised was rather inaccurate. The list was presumably last updated in 2009 (Parada 2011), including only the most prominent events, and the definition of what exactly was considered a film festival remained unclear. The Chilean government only distinguishes between itinerant film exhibitions and non-competitive festivals on the one hand, and competitive festivals on the other.⁹

Very different events could be included under the name of 'festival'. As Burgess and Kredell (2016, 161–162) point out, one of the main problems in film festival research is precisely finding an all-encompassing definition of what a film festival is, as their different institutional formats make it hard to find a common criterion to decide on their fundamental attributes. The 'film festival' category, Archibald and Miller suggest, ranges 'from the grassroots digital festivals created by small networks of independent and amateur filmmakers (...) to the vast institutional machinery of Sundance, or the critical mass of industry involvement found in Cannes' (2011, 250). Some of these festival models could be aspirational but not adequate to describe the actual organisation and dynamic of local festivals, and both film professionals' and researchers' expectations of what a festival is supposed to be might clash with those of the organisers and/or policymakers.

This discrepancy between what is expected of a film festival and the form of the events we observed in Chile was one of the first challenges to address in our attempt to map Chilean festivals. The government's definition of film festivals is so broad that any film exhibition could be a 'festival', but at the same time, in order to qualify for public funds

events need to fit several expectations about what a festival should accomplish, based on what important international film festivals seem to do (for example, provide industry hubs for filmmakers, attract international audiences, award prestigious films). This is also the expectation of local filmmakers and film producers, who tend to dismiss events that do not fit an 'ideal' model of a film festival that follows the main industry-oriented events of the international circuit, such as Cannes or Berlin. Many local events, however, are rather small film exhibition platforms created for local audiences who are neither professionals nor cinephiles,¹⁰ and even the larger events do not operate as industry-oriented events in a strict sense,¹¹ and do not fit the idea of a 'circuit' so well (Elsaesser 2005; de Valck 2007). Although most Chilean festivals tend to work as a network of events that both compete and collaborate with each other, only a few Chilean events (mainly FICValdivia, SANFIC and FIDOCS) work as both sociocultural and economic nodes that determine the patterns of circulation of films and can eventually impact their commercial distribution.

What then counts as a film festival in Chile? We decided to disregard some of these previous preconceptions that left smaller events out, and use only a broad operational concept of film festivals that included their general sociocultural dimensions and could help us observe the dynamics of a variety of events. We decided to define 'Chilean film festival' as every regular (annual or biannual) film and/or audiovisual exhibition taking place in Chile for two or more days that, in addition to showing films, includes activities that extend the experience of collective viewing, such as talks with the filmmakers and master classes. We considered as 'film festivals' both competitive and non-competitive events, with regional, national and international scope. This includes events that were not originally created in Chile but are organised locally (such as *Docs Barcelona* and *In-Edit* film festivals, both originated in Spain). This definition allowed us to create the database by archival research, which was then complemented with an ethnographic approach, including direct observation and in-depth interviews with organisers. By cross-referencing information, we managed to construct profiles of each film festival, including a short history for each event, which could be developed by further research into the detailed history of each festival.

The database encompasses the following data: official name, short name, nomenclature (internal code for identification), year of foundation, place (city and region), periodicity, month (taking into account its latest edition), type of event (competitive, non-competitive), type of films programmed (feature, documentary, shorts, animation), specialisation, industry spaces, and latest reported edition. It also includes festivals' websites, social media and contact details (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, email accounts) where they exist. Information was synthesised based on festivals' official catalogues and programmes, as well as other related sources (official posters, flyers, photographs and images created by the festival for self-promotion, as well as audiovisual material created by some film festivals). All these materials were compiled and digitised for further analysis, although most of the information was retrieved online, previously digitised by the festivals themselves in the case of the most recent editions. The main source of information for each listing is the festival's website or social media, but we will see that even these materials have been quite difficult to compile.

As we continued identifying events and updating information according to changes in the last two years, by October 2017 we had created an original database that has since

been updated every three months. The database compiles information regarding active and inactive Chilean film festivals. After revising the list of 52 film festivals provided by the Council of Audiovisual Art and Industry, the internet search continued by checking the list of winners of the Audiovisual Fund for supporting festivals,¹² as most Chilean events count or have counted on some form of state support, particularly in their early stages. We then compiled a new list of 150 events, which was afterwards reduced to 80 festivals by discarding those that were supposed to get funding but seemed to have never taken place (there was not record or references to their actual existence), or did not continue after a single edition, hence could not have any regularity.

We then selected the events that fit our ‘film festival’ category, ignoring those that only acted as recurring film exhibitions or *muestras*, that is to say, events that did not include any other activities extending the collective viewing experience, even in cases where they called themselves festivals (such as the *Festival de Cine de Las Condes*, Las Condes Film Festival).¹³ At the same time, some events that call themselves *muestras* but that have festival characteristics were included in our list, such as the *Muestra de Cine + Video Indígena* (Indigenous Film + Video Exhibition).¹⁴ This decision is of course controversial, more related to an *etic* (external) than an *emic* (internal) understanding of film festivals, in order to provide some consistency for both filmmakers who could use this information and researchers in the field.¹⁵ We assumed that both groups understand festivals as professional nodes and/or sociocultural platforms besides film exhibition, something the *muestras* do not offer.

We also created a separate list for ‘inactive’ (discontinued) festivals, which included all the festivals that have not had a new edition since 2016 and for which there is no news of an upcoming one. The total number of festivals that appeared to be ‘active’ online was contrasted with direct observations to check if the events were actually taking place during the period of research. The final number of 102 active festivals, updated in November 2018, includes all festivals created between 2017 and 2018, as well as smaller events that were not previously found. Some of these events were included after the research project was publicly launched and the first map was available online,¹⁶ when film professionals and festival organisers approached us to call our attention to events that were missing.

For the categorisation of local ‘film festivals’, we also decided on a particular classification system that does not correspond to international frameworks (Peirano and González 2018). The main form of classification created by the FIAPF to accredit some film festivals (known as ‘class A’ festivals) does not work for Chilean events, as no festival is recognised by the FIAPF. Turan’s classification by programming, distinguishing between business, political or aesthetics-oriented festivals (Turan 2002, 125–156), does not fit the Chilean case either, since most events combine political and aesthetic characteristics and include business-oriented spaces as well. Finally, we found that Peranson’s (2013) classification of business and audience festivals only allowed us to distinguish between audience and mixed festivals, since there are no fully business festivals in the strict sense in Chile. We therefore adapted the criteria by considering the combination of a festival’s specialisation, local ‘trajectory’ (years active) and position within the global circuit (number of world and national premieres exhibited). We then created five categories for active festivals: 1) international festivals with a recognised historical trajectory (which include the largest number of premieres); 2) longstanding generalist festivals (six or more

editions); 3) longstanding specialised and thematic festivals (a type of film, a specific audience or a particular theme, such as women, children or indigenous cinema); 4) emerging generalist festivals; 5) emerging specialised festivals.

Mapping and classifying film festivals necessitated understanding Chilean festivals' histories from fragmented and incomplete sources of information, as well as the particular social and cultural orientations of local festival organisers and filmmakers. Constructing an overview of the historical development of Chilean film festivals proved to be more challenging than we expected, as will be seen in the following sections regarding the archival and ethnographic research we conducted.

Bringing history to the map: the archival process

Until very recently, the history of Chilean film festivals has not been a topic of interest for Chilean film festival studies. There are only a few historical references in scarce publications, more noticeably to the Viña del Mar Film Festival (FICViña). For this festival, some original sources and personal recollections have been collected (Orell 2006; Trabucco 2014), starting with the personal account of founder Aldo Francia (1990). FICViña's development has been also discussed to understand the historical configuration of New Latin American Cinema in the 1960s (Román 2010; Flores 2013), but at the time we started the mapping there were no historical frameworks in existence for any other festival, except brief accounts on some festivals' own websites.¹⁷ Chilean film historian Jacqueline Mouesca (2005, 122) was the first to pay attention to the role of local film festivals in more recent national cinema, particularly the revival of FICViña in 1990 (the 'festival of reencounter'), and the *Festival Internacional de Cine Documental de Santiago* (Santiago International Documentary Film Festival FIDOCS) during the 1990s. The field, however, remained mostly under-researched until the 2010s (Itier, Sebastián 2017). As Vallejo (2014, 14–15) suggests, this gap corresponds to a global trend, since analysing the role of film festivals in film history has until recently been marginal within the field of film studies. Thus, in order to analyse festivals' articulations with the development of local film culture, it is necessary to create new and pertinent research strategies, including learning how to approach and systematise sources that have previously been ignored or overlooked.

The first difficulty encountered during the archival process was in compiling primary sources (such as programmes and flyers) that had largely been lost. Amid the precarious and volatile landscape of an ever-growing number of events, film festivals come and go, change their names or disappear, some of them apparently without a trace, either on paper or online. As mentioned above, creating the list of local festivals involved first identifying festivals that have received local funding by using a database provided by the Council of Audiovisual Art and Industry, while removing from that list one-off events or those that seemed to have never taken place (Ramírez 2017). However, obtaining reliable information on the events on this list was not an easy task, as there was no evidence whether they actually took place or not, let alone whether or not they had continued, not even references in the local press or on old websites and abandoned social media platforms.

The lack of internet sources that could be contrasted with other oral or written sources also made it difficult to be precise about the dates when festivals were created or ceased to

exist so as to construct an overview of their historical development. Identifying the start date is not always straightforward when there are no catalogues or other materials from the first edition, nor any documents stating the year of creation besides the occasional announcement in a local newspaper. In addition, some sources indicate the number of editions of a festival at a specific point in time, but these do not necessarily correspond to a chronological continuity, thus counting back in order to calculate their foundation year can be inaccurate. A festival's fifth edition does not guarantee that it has taken place for the last five years in a row. For example, the small *Festival Internacional de Cine de Rengo* (Rengo International Film Festival, FECIR) existed for 12 years before intermitting in 2015 and 2016, and only came back in 2017 for its 13th edition after skipping two years. Since local festivals work in quite challenging conditions and it is difficult for them to secure funding, chances are that an event will not take place one year, but get back on track afterwards. For these reasons, when the exact foundation year is not clearly stated it needs to be verified with the organisers themselves (in cases when it is possible to contact them).¹⁸

Festivals' historical trajectories (meaning their frequency, regularity and endurance) tend to be unstable, depending on the fragile short-term system of local funding. It is therefore also quite complicated to determine whether or not a festival has disappeared: has it gone for good or are the organisers preparing a comeback by applying again for funds? Government funding is granted annually for all film festivals, which compete with each other year after year, and very few are selected. Only in 2013 did the Council of Audiovisual Art and Industry create a separate grant that awards festivals' endurance, but resources were only allocated to larger festivals, such as the *Festival Internacional de Cine de Valdivia* (Valdivia International Film Festival FICValdivia), which fulfilled the criteria of being competitive, having a minimum historical trajectory of 10 years, contributing to the dissemination of national films and 'to the projection of the Chilean audiovisual industry and the development of the national audiovisual field, considering complementary activities to the exhibition of works as well as the realisation of audience formation'.¹⁹ Since 2016 a new two-year government fund has also been allocated for some smaller but longstanding festivals that have fulfilled these criteria, such as the 11-year old *Festival de Cine Chileno* (Chilean Film Festival FECICH), leaving newer and non-competitive events applying annually for the rest of the funds.

Since 2018 it has been even harder for non-competitive festivals and those between their fifth and tenth editions to get any support, given that funding schemes privilege either longstanding or newer events, while the rest are expected to be economically self-sufficient. As a result, organisers spend a lot of their time, energy and resources applying for annual funds and looking for alternative sources of funding, and events failing to secure these are likely to disappear. Some festivals that have not taken place for several years hope to return at some point – mainly based on their organisers' enthusiasm – so it is difficult to say when a festival is definitely finished. Identifying active and non-active festivals becomes a delicate matter for researchers: could we just decide to 'kill' a festival that is in recess? In our case, until we had official confirmation from the organisers of a permanent closure, we left those festivals on the active list.

Reconstructing other aspects of festivals' histories was also limited by the lack of materials available, particularly for older editions. Although most festivals produce film programmes, only a few established ones create more detailed catalogues that could help us further analyse their historical trajectories. Catalogues allow us to reconstruct festivals'

development in relation to their rationale, how they define themselves and their objectives and the images they use to present themselves to the public, by comparing continuities and changes in their organisation, curatorial lines and programming structures, as well as their relationship with guests, juries and local institutions. Other useful materials are also scarce, including what Zielinski (2016) refers to as 'ephemera' (posters, flyers, memorabilia, etc.) which, as he rightly observes, 'might be the sole remaining material evidence' for 'festivals with low funding and no archives' (2016, 140), as is the case for the majority of Chilean events.

Besides some personal collections, neither catalogues nor ephemera are kept in film archives, nor they are systematised or available to the public. Festivals themselves very rarely keep their own materials and collections, only, as in Zielinski's cases, 'if they have the space to store it, a notion to collect it, and have taken the extra effort to retain it' (2016, 141). Some collections are kept privately by former or current organisers in their homes, but there is no public knowledge of who has these materials or what is actually kept. To our initial surprise, this is even true for longstanding and well-established festivals, which have not systematically preserved their catalogues and/or ephemera, and do not always make them accessible to the public. Except for its latest editions, most of FICViña's catalogues are still missing and are not available online. CineLebu (*Festival Internacional de Cine de Lebu*) publishes a report of their editions only from 1999 to 2009. And even though FICValdivia and SANFIC (Santiago International Film Festival) have most of their catalogues digitised and accessible online,²⁰ their digital collection is still incomplete, missing some catalogues of specific editions.

Not only are paper formats missing, but festivals' online resources are also incomplete. In most cases, websites do not provide much historical information. Sometimes they offer a short 'history' of the event (next to the 'who we are' section) that tells the story of the festival's origins and foundation, while remaining silent about any editions between the first and the most recent. Moreover, only festivals' programmes and/or the digitised catalogue of the latest updated edition are likely to be available online, and most of their websites are not consistent. They change their contents every year (which means that online information once available can disappear overnight) and do not keep all the information on the same official online page. Older versions of webpages are hidden on the internet and not connected to the current festival site, so although some past information can still be retrieved, this requires a kind of archaeological research, investing time and effort in trying to find forgotten old pages that are not supposed to be found, which was the case with FIDOCS, for example. Festivals make it very difficult to access their historical records, an obstacle reinforcing the impression that, with a few exceptions, most of them do not aim to remember or show their past: they seem unwilling to provide any historical sense of themselves in their public image.

This is even more evident for those festivals that do not have official webpages but only Facebook profiles.²¹ Facebook timelines make it easy to check the latest events of the current edition of a festival, or even to check back over some of their recent editions, but scrolling down to look for older versions (in the cases when you can find them) is both time consuming and confusing, and complicates the process of forming a historical sense of the festival. It is true that some historical information is still embedded in social media, but this information does not set up a clear narrative and is difficult to access for anyone not involved in the festival organisation (such as filmmakers and producers who would

like to be familiar with the festival's stance) since it is quite fragmented and is not structured to narrate the festival's historical trajectory. On the contrary, Facebook's structure tends to create an image of an ever-present event, which blurs festivals' histories by displaying them through unconnected photo galleries and past comments, easy to be liked and forgotten.

We can see that social media platforms extend the live experience of film festivals online, mirroring their contingent nature. Film festivals, like any cultural event, are structured on the lived experience of their participants, on 'being there' in a specific moment that hopefully will keep repeating itself every one or two years. Their cyclic nature produces a time, as Harbord suggests, built into an 'affective and emphatic now' (2016, 72), which lets their participants live them as intense ever-present events. Social media are not designed so much to preserve their memories in the long term, but to expand on that present experience at the time of the event, increasing its intensity for the on-site participants and including others that are not there in person. Therefore, the use of social media records for historical research imposes several limitations, which highlight festivals' lack of concern regarding building their own histories.

As the research process became more collaborative, some filmmakers, cultural managers and festivals organisers were kind enough to share their own festival materials with the research team, helping to construct our digital archive. However, the process was quite slow. A significant portion of the material is still missing and there are some gaps, which can only be filled with the collaboration of generous professionals, researchers and colleagues. For example, most of the catalogues of the Santiago Documentary Film Festival FIDOCs had been previously compiled by scholar Elizabeth Ramírez Soto during her own research of Chilean documentary cinema. Ramírez shared her research collection with us, including missing catalogues of the first editions of the festival in the late 1990s, which proved to be invaluable for understanding the history of the festival (see Peirano 2018). The case of FIDOCs exemplifies the difficulty of a task that depends on personal connections and relationships with other agents in the field, as we will see in the following section.

The approach of festivals to their own material traces described in this section seemed puzzling at the beginning. I was expecting them to be more eager to treasure their own histories and even to try to show off their own experiences, especially in the very competitive field in which they are situated, where this experience equals an accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital as forms of knowledge and prestige. Instead, webpages, ephemera, programmes and even catalogues seem to be produced only for the time being, ready for the event and easily forgotten. Festivals are so focused on the annual event that both preserving their materials for the future and recovering those of the past are a very low priority for organisers, who do not have the time, money or interest to accumulate their histories.

This is surely a result, as suggested above, of film festivals being an ephemeral event, 'a form of managed contingency' (Harbord 2016, 72). In the case of Chilean festivals, this is reinforced by their precarious conditions, which make their existences so unpredictable. The question of intermittent funding, for example, has had a direct impact not only on festivals' permanence but also on their everyday practices and self-perceptions. As a consequence of their unpredictable futures, festivals tend to direct all their energy to the production of the programmed event, to intensifying the festival experience, and to

showing its immediate results, posting pictures online and quick comments on social media, without paying much attention to more lasting formats of self-promotion. They act as constant novelties, and even those with long trajectories tend to quickly forget their past, while planning only short-term futures. Festivals' practices seem marked by this immediacy, finding it difficult to see the value in recognising their histories, as they live in a constant state of emergency that makes it difficult to think in the long term.

Collecting oral histories: ethnographic research

The study of festivals' archival materials was complemented by ethnographic research, which proved to be vital for understanding their historical trajectories. Participant observation helped us to put material sources into context and to create some critical distance from the festivals' discourses embedded in those materials, which were then contrasted with the festivals' everyday practices and their organisers' testimonies, a common advantage of an ethnographic perspective in film festival research (Dayan 2000, 52; Lee 2016, 124; Vallejo 2017, 255–256). In addition, given the difficulty in collecting festivals' archival materials, 'being there' was useful not only to understand the dynamics of film festivals from first-hand experience, but also to look for those materialities. As mentioned above, personal relationships with festivals are vital to access their materials, and gaps in festivals' histories can be reconstructed with oral histories through in-depth interviews and conversations with founders and other organisers, often enthusiastic filmmakers, cultural managers and other cultural mediators.

Collecting the personal experiences of different members of the festival team can help to understand festivals' aims, context, curatorial decisions and institutional frameworks that would not be possible to understand solely from written and visual sources. In turn, the collected material helped spark interviewees' memories and rework festivals' cultural memory through the interviewing process, since these 'memory texts' (Kuhn 2002, 11) can help recreate and decontextualise their festival experiences. In some cases, I brought catalogues into the interviews and used them to remind the organisers of old programmes and curatorial decisions, occasionally to contrast their recollections with some of the facts stated in the written sources. This collaborative approach made the task not only easier but also joyful, as both interviewer and interviewee could take pleasure in sharing past anecdotes and challenging set beliefs that did not agree with the official documents.

But retrieving oral histories also poses its own research challenges. Personal memories are fragile and can contradict other experiences, and the researcher can find herself amid different versions of festivals' histories. Ethnography can help to get a sense of the tensions underlying the construction of these histories, and which aspects do or do not make it into the institutional history (Lee 2016, 135). In a small field of cultural production like the Chilean one, these different versions might suggest tense relationships with past events and between agents in the field. The Chilean field is formed of a rather small community of filmmakers, cultural managers and mediators, where often 'everyone knows each other' (Peirano 2015). Festivals tend to build reciprocity with one other, particularly when the same people are involved in more than one festival in different roles (as festival directors, producers, mediators, and so on), and organisers often circulate through different events, positioning themselves in the field by accumulating cultural and

symbolic capital. Thus, while most agents' relationships are cooperative, they also can be somewhat competitive, leading to conflicts within a single festival and/or between different events. As a result, stories about the creation, organisation and historical development of film festivals can be in dispute, either used to legitimate agents' positions or to reveal some of the conflicts between them. Official hegemonic narratives can obscure long-term disagreements and complicated and competitive relationships that may not be noticeable at first glance.

For a researcher, this means that festivals' self-narratives are often fragmented and sometimes unclear. Moreover, even when they are remembered, some organisers might want to forget some aspect of the film festival's history. We can hypothesise that such tensions may be one of the reasons for festivals not to keep clear records of their own history, and not to make more effort to look into their past. Searching for these stories and deciding to write about them also means that the researcher needs to position herself regarding this history, which could then be seen as 'taking sides' in a research process that otherwise needs to be as impartial as possible. While positionality is a problem for all kinds of film festival research, particularly in relation to the insider/outsider dilemma (Burgess and Kredell 2016, 159), this is a critical point in the case of ethnographic research. Even when the ethnographer does not work in the festivals' organisation, her own position in the field is one of the main obstacles, as she is socially and emotionally involved with the informants, as well as being willing to collaborate with festivals' in their future developments. A fully committed ethnographic approach necessarily supposes several ethical and epistemological considerations, including the challenge of trying to maintain a neutral position, while at the same time nurturing the human relationships fostered during fieldwork. Building trust with festivals organisers is a fundamental part of the process, and relationships can be at risk if the researcher is not fully aware of their fragility, as all human relationships are. In our case, we tried not to get involved in festivals' conflicts and to listen equally to all agents in the field. Of course, while most organisers were open to contributing to our research, we occasionally found a few who refused to participate, and in those cases we had to proceed without their voices being heard.

Needless to say, these issues have an impact on the development of the research: how much of the history can be written and revealed, what materials can be accessed, who provides information, who refuses to do so, and who is willing to support the project. They even impact the ways we construct the object of study. For example, our classification of Chilean festivals, as mentioned above, ignores some common categories, such as 'class A' festivals, used in the hierarchical models of the international film festival circuit. This category has recently changed globally, and is not useful for understanding the Chilean context, as local festivals often have different aims than competing for prestige, but it also seemed imprudent to keep using hierarchical models in doing ethnography among national festivals. As we were not film professionals, we were in a better position to see festivals with some distance. We looked at filmmakers' choices to premiere their films in long-term festivals, creating a first group of locally-perceived prestige festivals ('type one'), but the rest of our classification model ignores these elements and privileges other traits observed in the field (such as audience development), balancing the idea that the first group is necessarily the most important one. To decide unilaterally which festivals were the 'best', most prestigious or most important festivals in Chile could have turned researchers into examiners instead of impartial observers. And whereas we

could give feedback to festivals regarding the effectiveness of their work with the communities they are based in, it seemed improper to turn ethnographic research into an assessment project that redistributes prestige, also risking our position in the field.

Conclusion: ephemeral landscapes

Researching film festivals' histories is similar to an archaeological endeavour, aiming to look for fragments and remains. Memories, written fragments and images are out there, like pieces of a jigsaw that need to be put together with patience. With a view to creating a written narrative of festivals' historical trajectories, researchers need a certain flexibility, using diverse forms of collecting, compiling, listening and putting materials into context. This article has given an account of the different strategies used in the case of Chilean film festivals in order to assemble historical data spread across a range of primary sources, including festivals' accounts, catalogues, ephemera, and oral history. The research process involved creating an archive of previously scattered sources, by systematising fragmented materials and memories, and building a map of festivals' trajectories in the growing landscape of local film festivals. Giving an account of this process and the decisions taken and procedures followed during research will hopefully contribute to the creation of some methodological guidelines and frameworks for other researchers attempting to map film festivals, particularly when they aim to include smaller, lesser known and more unstable festivals in the picture.

The Chilean case also reveals challenges that are common to studying the histories of ephemeral cultural events. Working with their histories unveils festivals' complex relationship with their own pasts. Festivals are structured on the cyclic lived experience of their participants, which leads their participants to live them as intense ever-present events. After years of repetition, this experience creates a fragile sense of historical continuity. Their precarious conditions of existence and uncertain futures tend to reinforce this sense, which often involves a lack of historical self-awareness and complicates the narration of their own pasts. Festivals' social constitution, collaborative work models, and competitive relationships also make the reconstruction of their own memories difficult – even when sharing past experiences and recollections is part of what keeps organisers' passion and helps teams working together in everyday life. Researching film festivals with an ethnographic approach, working as an outsider who, time after time, immerses herself in festivals as an insider, can help spark festivals' memories, collect fragments of their past, and make them dialogue with their present. This can be an opportunity for research to motivate new forms of self-reflection in festival organisers and cultural managers, starting a conversation about their histories and looking toward their futures.

Notes

1. The festival originated in the *Festival de Cine Amateur de Viña del Mar*, founded in 1963.
2. A third edition of the festival was supposed to take place in October 1973, but this was stopped by the military coup of 11 September 1973.
3. For example, FICValdivia (1994, <http://www.ficvaldivia.cl/>), FESANCOR (1993, <http://fesancor.cl/>) and FIDOCs (1997, <http://www.fidocs.cl/>).
4. For example, SANFIC (2005, <http://www.sanfic.com/>), IN-EDIT (2004, <http://www.inedit.cl/>) and FEMCINE (2011, <http://www.femcine.cl/>). As of November 2018 (when this article

- was written) we could identify a total of 102 active film festivals in Chile, 41 with a long-term trajectory (more than 10 years).
5. Between 2014 and 2016, 30 new festivals were created (13 in 2016 alone), and since 2016, an average of nine new festivals have appeared every year.
 6. Following de Valck (2007, 32–36) this article takes an Actor-Network Theory perspective on film festivals, considering them as non-human actors with social agency. Festivals are seen as integral to the process of reproducing social relations, to highlight the relational interdependence between participant agents in the field of film production, including both humans and non-human actors such as funds, legal frameworks, and other institutions.
 7. This ethnography was conducted as part of my PhD research project on the building of the Chilean field of film production during this period ‘Contemporary Chilean Cinema: Film Practices and Narratives of National Cinema within the Chilean “Film Community”’ (2015).
 8. This work was supported by the CNCA (National Council for Art and Culture) under Grant Audiovisual Fund 410,942; and the CONICYT (National Council for Science and Technology) under Grant Fondecyt n° 11,160,735. The mapping was conducted by myself and fellow researchers Gonzalo Ramírez and Sebastián González Itier. The ethnographic research was also conducted by myself and research assistants Javiera Navarrete and Marcela Valdovinos.
 9. www.fondosdecultura.cl.
 10. For example, the *Festival de Cine Chileno*, FECICH (<http://fecich.cl/>), and *Festival de Cine de Rengo*, FECIR (<http://www.fecir.cl/>).
 11. For example, SANFIC (<http://www.sanfic.com/>), FICVIÑA (<https://www.cinevina.cl/>) and FICValdivia (<http://ficvaldivia.cl/>).
 12. www.chileaudiovisual.cultura.gob.cl.
 13. <https://festivalcinelascondes.cl/>.
 14. <https://www.facebook.com/cinevideoindigena/>.
 15. An etic approach involves a description of a particular culture in terms of in terms of an external scheme rather than considering its internal elements from the point of view of the subjects of study (emic approach).
 16. www.festivalesdecine.cl.
 17. For example, SANFIC, FICVALDIVIA and CineLebu (<http://cinelebu.cl>).
 18. On top of this, a festival’s foundation year of does not always correspond to the year of the first edition, as some festivals consider that the year they came up with the idea, and applied for funding for the first time, counts as their ‘year of foundation’. We considered the foundation year the first in which the festival actually took place.
 19. www.fondosdecultura.cl. In Spanish in the original, translated by the author.
 20. See <http://www.sanfic.com/> and <http://ficvaldivia.cl/>.
 21. For example, the *Festival de Cine de Terror de Valdivia* (Valdivia Horror Film Festival), the *Festival de Cine Documental de La Pintana*, *Pintacannes* (La Pintana Documentary Film Festival) or even the *Muestra de Cine + Video Indígena*, whose information can be retrieved in the website of the Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino (Precolombian Art Museum) that collaborates with the festival (www.precolombino.cl).

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