

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT DEBATES

CineCita: Amplifying the Female Voice Participatory Video in the Andean Region

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Every human being has the right to "take part in cultural life"¹. The right to participate in the production and consumption of cultural goods 'is an integral part of human rights and, like other rights, is universal, indivisible and interdependent.'² Unfortunately, it must sometimes still be made clear that a human right applies just as much to women as it does to men.³

CineCita – La Mirada de Ella was a film festival and video laboratory that traveled through Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, aiming to:

- Transmit women's voices between Latin America and Europe
- Empower female roles in rural communities in the Andes
- Foster long-term cooperation between the participating organisations

The project was funded by the *European Union* and *Hivos* and primarily implemented by five organisations from Ecuador (*La Cinta Corta*), Peru (*Nomadas*), Bolivia (*COMPRA*) and Germany (*Moviemiento* and *Globale Medienwerkstatt*).

All these organisations actively participate in mobile film festivals and/or audio-visual media education and are linked by the firm belief that participatory video can serve as an important tool for creative self-expression. Participatory video has been used in development for more than 30 years: "NGOs, development workers, and indeed communities themselves [use it] to foster dialogue and to instigate change and empowerment."⁴ Today, digital video has made filming and editing more affordable and easy to do. Furthermore, the internet allows videos to be released to a broad global audience.

The project's partners followed participatory video ideology, giving control of video production to workshop participants. This tool "can serve as a powerful force for people to see themselves in relation to the community and to become conscious of personal and community needs. It brings about a critical awareness that forms the foundation for creativity and communication. Thus it has the potential to bring about personal, social, political and cultural change."⁵

CineCita focused on the Andes region and on rural women's perspectives in particular. Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia all rank in the bottom 20 of the United Nation's (UN) World Inequality Indicator List, with indigenous groups listed as those who profited the least from economic growth in the last two decades. These indicators also point to enormous differences in the accessibility of art and media in these countries where it tends to be very centralized in the capitals. This effect increases even more in rural and often indigenous regions where, inside already marginalized communities, women have the weakest position.

¹ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Art. 15, Section 1(a)

² Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the General Comment 21, Section. 1.1

³ UN-Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Art. 13, Section C

⁴ Harris, Usha Sundar: Transforming Images: Reimagining Women's Work through Participatory Video in Development in Practice, Volume 19, Numbers 4–5, June 2009, p. 541

⁵ White, S.A. (ed.). 2003. Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower. Sage Publications, New Delhi, India: 64

"Participatory Video is particularly useful in helping to protect women's indigenous knowledge as well as lift their perceived positions in their communities."⁶ In communities in which histories and traditions are passed on orally, video can serve as a technical bridge, bringing information from marginalized regions to national centers and to the world at large. Video work with women can help to make women more visible and to raise their status within their communities. The workshops were given in an exclusively female environment to help women feel more comfortable and confident when learning to use this creative and technical medium.

The tour

The tour started at the beginning of October 2010 and concluded at the end of January 2011. A varying team of 6-9 video educational staff and the coordinating crew traveled in a specially outfitted coach more than 3,000 km (around 1,850 miles) through the coastal (costa), mountain (sierra) and jungle (selva) regions of the Andean States. They were accompanied by professional video equipment and a mobile cinema secured in a burglar-proof metal box.

An international selection of 22 short films representing the female voice were screened a total of 26 times on the tour, and were combined to create a specially designed programme for each location. As soon as the screen was put up in public squares or open fields, the audience began arriving. Some had walked as far as 10 km to take part in this big event, and for many, it was the first time they had seen cinema. All of the events ended with enthusiastic applause and often with warm tea and delicious homemade tortillas for everybody.

To empower female roles in these rural societies, the video laboratory segment of the festival provided young women between the ages of 15 and 25 with the basic tools for documentary filmmaking. During the six one-week video workshops in remote communities, participants learned how to handle cameras and sound equipment. They developed their own ideas based on their unique personal backgrounds and learned to express themselves in a creative way.

On the seventh day the big event took place, and all villagers came to see the first movies made from inside their own communities, incredibly by their young daughters. At this moment of truth, based on the excited and proud faces of the young filmmakers' relatives, it was immediately apparent that *CineCita* had achieved its aims: to strengthen the place of women in their communities and advance new perspectives. The young women's videos then became part of the film programme for subsequent screenings. In most cases, the films made during the workshops were even better received than the international productions.

Although the tour is over, the project is still underway. Products to follow up the festival are currently in production, including the 26 short documentaries made by the young women, a tour documentary, a tour blog, and a printed booklet in Spanish and English to accompany a DVD. Additionally, the Latin American partners were invited to Europe in May 2011 to present the results at a wide range of film festivals, in articles and television features, in public discussions and screenings, as well as at school and university events. The success of these events demonstrated the high level of interest in Europe in getting personal insight into the lives and souls of young women in South America. It would not have been possible to satisfy this need without the incredible opportunities offered by audio-visual media.

And cooperation in the international network continues: Initial applications for *CineCita 2* are already on their way. Let the festival continue!

Read more and watch the videos at: www.cinecita.org

⁶ Protz, Maria: Q&A: Gender and Participatory Video in Agriculture and Development, CTA. 2007. Film-making Farmers. [http://ictupdate.cta.int/en/\(issue\)/34](http://ictupdate.cta.int/en/(issue)/34)