

‘Le film, éducateur universel’.²⁹ The reception of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute in Chile

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In the context of the interwar period, the discussion surrounding the educational character of cinema, as well as the possibilities that came from its cosmopolitanism, turned film into an exceptional medium that could promote ideas of internationalism and cultural cooperation. To respond to these interests and contribute to the development and strengthening of intellectual cooperation, the League of Nations supported the development of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (IECI), which was active between 1928 and 1937 with its headquarters located in Rome, Italy. Mussolini’s government saw in cinema a tool for mass communications that could impact people, have persuasion power, and projection into the future, while, at the same time, being able to link these qualities with cinema’s education potential (Sorlin 1994; 2007). The objective behind the IECI “was to encourage the production, dissemination and exchange of educational films in order to promote international understanding among the world’s peoples” (Unesco Archives, n.d.). The IECI was placed under the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) and was “one of the most successful interwar experiments in cultural cooperation” (Iriye 1997, 71).

One of the reasons why the IECI was so successful was due to its ability to reach many members of the League of Nations, as well as extend invitations to participate to states who were not, at the time, active members of the international organization (such as Mexico) (Herrera León 2008). Although not all Latin American countries participated actively of the League of Nations and adjacent Institutes, Chile was perhaps one of the most constant members of the region, joining de League in 1920. Although Chile did not have an active cinema industry, with only a few films being made per year and coming from private initiatives (Ossa Coo 1971; Mouesca 1997), the Chilean government created the Instituto de Cine Educativo (ICE) [Educational Cinema Institute] in December 1929 (Alvarez, Colleoni and Horta 2014, 28). The Chilean Institute initially depended on the Ministry of Education, but from 1931 its administration became dependent on the University of Chile, which became the main institution in charge of cultural diplomacy during the 1930s and until the 1973 coup d’etat (Dumont 2018). The link between the ICE and the IECI was established after the Chilean institute was created, but became the official representative of the international institute in the country.

The exchanges between the IECI and the Chilean ICE allow to explore how particular nations received, appropriated, and translated into their local field, the ideas and projects of cultural internationalism that were put forward by a supranational organization, such as the IECI. To address these exchanges and networks, the concept of cultural internationalism, as well as institutional and diplomatic approaches to the topic are key because they allow us to analyse the circulation of ideas and how networks were built around these circulations. Moreover, by exploring the dialogue between the SDN’s IECI and a Latin American nation, the aims is to include this region into the discussion of cultural internationalism, thinking about the ways in which nations used and appropriated ideas that came from supranational organizations, through translating them to their own interpretation of cultural internationalism.

The archival approach includes using data from the United Nations archive, the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères in France (series 242QO), and the Archivo Nacional de la Administración (ARNAD) in Chile (series MEDU and MREL). The Chilean National Library holds 14 letters sent between Luciano

²⁹ This is a phrase written by Jean Benoit-Levy, French film director and producer, in a letter to the Organisation de Cooperation Intellectuelle regarding cinema and the education of peoples. See Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, FRMAE 242QO, folder 1889, p.177.

de Feo and Gabriela Mistral regarding the IECI and Mistral's work within the organization. Memoria Chilena holds the three ICE available newsletters. The annals of the Universidad de Chile, the institution which housed the Chilean Cinema Institute, are held digitally on the university's website. By examining these documents, one can understand the different ways in which communication between the two educational cinema institutions took place, as well as how governmental and institutional decisions were included.

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