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Conecta Fiction Analyzes Latino Scripted Format Business

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A panel at last week's Series Mania, organized by Conecta Fiction, Spain's new TV co-production forum, analyzed the challenges of adapting Latino scripted series formats for other markets

PARIS — [Conecta Fiction](#), the new Latino TV drama co-production forum, hosted a panel at [Series Mania](#) which analyzed adaptations of scripted formats from Spain and Latin America.



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scripted drama in 2016, according to statistics presented by Eurodata TV at Series Mania. That said, redos have indirectly yielded some of Spain's greatest ratings hits in international: RAI1's "Braccialetti Rossi," an Italian reversion of Spain's hospital-set "Polseres Vermelles," a teen friendship drama produced by Filmax and first aired on Catalonia's TV3; France's "Disparue," which made over Spain's groundbreaking missing daughter mystery "Desaparecida," punching 20%-plus ratings on France 2 from its debut in April 2015; M6's evergreen ratings phenomenon "Escènes de ménage," inspired by Jose Luis Moreno's "Escenas de Matrimonio," made up of comic sketches of marriage, charting its small miseries and even smaller joys.

In 2015, Spain was cited by The Wit, a Switzerland-based TV content analysis company, as the No. 1 country in the world for scripted format reversions, thanks to "Los Misterios de Laura," from

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pubcaster RTVE, with four remakes to its name, and “Polseres Vermelles,” with seven, one on Fox in the U.S, another on Germany’s Vox.

International revenues are now ever more important to free-to-air broadcasters as their budgets come under increasing pressure.

“Spanish networks didn’t use to think about export when developing series,” Fernando Javier Lopez Puig, RTVE head of cinema and fiction, said at the Conecta Fiction round table. Now, however, he added, given “financing needs and market evolution,” “there is a need to look for products that can be co-productions or local product that has the capacity to adapt to other cultures.”

Moderated by Geraldine Gonard, CEO of Inside Content, the organizer of Conecta Fiction’s, the Series Mania round table focused on giving practical advice about adaptations as it charted the considerable road bumps on the way to a successful Latino scripted series re-version.

Latino format remakes face multiple challenges, Gonard said.

One is the originals’ running time. Free-to-air Spanish series come in at around 70 minutes. That allows them, with breaks, to play across the whole of peak primetime, said Lopez Puig,

allowing broadcasters to pack a two-hour slot with just one show. Saving sensibly on program costs, that is unlikely to change, he added.

Adapting abroad to around 45-minute standard international formats, the solution, is “not to be arrogant, not change everything, but leave aside the less interesting and slower parts, take the great and really great and join the latter together,” Iris Bucher, CEO-producer of “Disparue” at Paris-based Quad TV, said at the Conecta Fiction panel.

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Especially for traditional Latin America telenovelas, another headache can be their number of episodes, “80 or more, a huge difference from the 10-13 part European productions. Gonard pointed out. Long-format, one-season daily soaps are still made in many countries in Europe, such as Portugal, however. Portuguese writer Artur Ribeiro, another Conecta Fiction speaker, adapted the 131-part Chilean telenovela “Hijos del Monte” into “Belmonte,” produced by Portuguese TV network TVI and aired from 2013. It ended up having 259 episodes in Portugal.

The panel’s largest focus, however, was by far on cultural and industrial differences which mark the constant challenge – and interest for creatives – of adaptations. Their analysis made for an entertaining panel.

Latino characters emote far more, Gonard said. That may seem cultural stereotyping but is born out by an extract from Spain’s “Desaparecida,” showrun for RTVE by a then 31-year-old Ramon Campos who, rolling off its ratings success, founded Bambu Productions. The company has gone on to make “Las chicas de cable,” Netflix’s first series in Spain.

“Desaparecida” turned on a cute 18-year-old girl who never returns from a night out. A rare 2007 fall hit in Spain, it was remade as “Disparu” (“Disappearance”) in France by Quad TV, the TV division of “The Intouchables” producer. A big hit for France 2 in 2015, the French version also drew robust audiences on BBC4.

The virtue of the Spanish version is that of the French: A constantly twisting crime investigation which drops clues, plowing multiple false trails. But its characters had to change for the French version, Bucher recalled at the Conecta Fiction panel.

“In the Spanish version, the mother of the girl who disappears is a very Spanish mother: Her job is to take care of the family. But the remake was for a modern French public: In France, more than 80% of mothers work,” Bucher said.



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So in “Disparu,” played by Alix Poisson (“Les Revenants”), the French mother is given a profession, working in local government. She does take to beaujolais and prescription pills after her daughter disappears. But in Spain’s “Desaparecida,” in its opening scene, the mother is far more smothering, working herself into a frenzy of worry even before her daughter goes missing and is just getting ready to go out.

“We created a whole new character for the mother, but kept to the story line,” Bucher remembered.

U.S. shows are far more star-driven than Spain’s: Hollywood has far more ratings-driving stars.

Running from 2009 to 2014 on RTVE, “Los misterios de Laura” (*pictured*) turned on a ill-dressed divorcee (Maria Pujalte), who despite her hallmark old gabardine dress-sense, manages to dovetail motherhood of two twins with work as a police detective and solves cases by intuition rather than scientific proof – factors which served to set the series apart from many U.S. procedural

When NBC remade “Los misterios de Laura” as “the Mysteries of Laura,” attaching Debra Messing (“Will & Grace”) as Laura, it was almost inevitable that Laura ended up as more glamorous than her Spanish original, Lopez commented.

U.S. networks also have far higher budgets, Lopez added. That has inevitable consequences. In Sony’s “Timeless,” its heroes time travel via a shuttle, Gonard pointed out. In RTVE’s equivalent, “The Department of Time,” another time-travel drama, they just step through an ornate door.

“In Poland, the main theme for audiences is the family,” said TVN head of series Oriana Kujawska, talking audiences through the adaptation by the Polish commercial channel of Argentine original “Cita a ciegas” (Blind Date).



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“So, we had to create a strong family unit to give our character as much life [defining context] as she needed,” Kujawska added. One example: A cleaning lady who plays a key role in the original was transformed into the girl’s grandmother.

In the final analysis, “nobody makes adaptations slavishly following the original script,” Ribeiro concluded.

But adapters shouldn’t be prejudiced either, he warned. When he first saw Chile’s “Hijos del monte,” “I thought there was no way to translate this universe to Portugal,” he recalled. “We had this joke about the first episode that in Latin America people don’t use contraception because in the first episode everyone was having kids with the wrong partners.”

But, talking with the original’s producers, he was able to drive through to the show’s premise, and think of what differences had to be introduced into “Belmonte,” the Portuguese version. His makeover went on to win an Intl. Emmy nomination.

To take place in Santiago de Compostela, at the end of the St. James Way in Galicia, North Spain, Conecta Fiction runs June 20-23.

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