

From the Grand Hotel to the Piazza Grande: The Locarno Film Festival's Quest for Legitimacy (1946–77)

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ABSTRACT

The Locarno Film Festival is one of the oldest film festivals in the world. Founded in 1946, it is today widely recognized as an international hub for emerging cinema. However, what remains little known is that it was originally conceived as a touristic attraction managed by a few film professionals, and thus had to fight hard to impose its artistic and cultural ambitions over the interests of the tourism and film industries. This article shows that, considering that Locarno was neither created nor supported by political authorities or cultural institutions, its evolution heavily depended on the economic interests of a tourist organization and professional associations of film producers, distributors, and cinema operators. Looking beyond the official narrative publicized in commemorative books depicting the festival as a privileged place for avant-garde cinema since its early years, the article demonstrates that Locarno's specialization in new cinema was decided in a context of commercial pressures and increasing competition between film festivals. Focusing on the period during which it evolved from a small-scale, provincial celebration to an international platform for art house cinema, it argues that the so-called cinephile editions of 1966–70—when the directors of the event decided to completely distance themselves from the tourist imperatives and commercial function of the festival—must be understood as a radical and short-lived experience in the history of Locarno, rather than a representative trend.

1. Shweta Kishore, "Beyond Cinephilia. Situating the Encounter between Documentary Film and Film Festival Audiences: the Case of the Ladakh International Film Festival, India," *Third Text* 27, no. 6 (2013): 738; Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, eds., *Cinephilia. Movies, Love and Memory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005); Laurent Creton, "Engagement cinéphilique et logique territoriale: le festival Ciné 32 Indépendance(s) et Création," *Loisir et Société* 44, no. 1 (2021): 23. On film festivals as alternative to or resistance against Hollywood hegemony, see Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

2. Among the few events mainly supported by local cinephiles after the Second World War were the Sydney Film Festival (1954) and the San Francisco Film Festival (1957).

3. Christel Taillibert and John Wäfler, "Groundwork for a (Pre) history of Film Festivals," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016): 5–21.

4. Frédéric Mesplomb, *Objectif 49: Cocteau et la nouvelle avant-garde* (Paris: Séguier, 2014).

5. Kirsten Stevens, "Enthusiastic Amateurs: Australia's Film Societies and the Birth of Audience-Driven Film Festivals in Post-War Melbourne," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016): 22–39.

6. The first federal law on cinema in Switzerland came into effect in 1963. Before that, the Confederation had no legal basis to support the festival. Gianni Haver and Pierre Emmanuel Jacques, *Le spectacle cinématographique en Suisse (1895-1945)* (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2003); Olivier Moeschler, *Cinéma suisse: une politique culturelle en*

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Introduction

Today, the Locarno Film Festival (LFF) is renowned as an international hub for emerging cinema. Founded in 1946, the Swiss event is also one of the oldest film festivals in the world, which contributed to the celebration of Italian neo-realism, Czechoslovakian New Wave, Latin American, and Asian cinema. Despite the scarce scientific literature on the LFF, all these elements, proudly highlighted by the current organization of the festival, are common knowledge. However, what is far less documented is the fact that Locarno, originally conceived as a touristic attraction managed by a few film professionals, had to fight hard to impose its artistic and cultural ambitions over the interests of the tourism and the film industries.

As "alternatives to traditional commercial distribution" supposedly driven by cinephilia, film festivals tend to embody the traditional dichotomy opposing art and commerce, industrial entertainment and cultural auteurism.¹ Yet no film festival was created with purely artistic motivations.² The first cinematographic competitions ever recorded had mainly commercial objectives,³ and even the mythical *Festival du film maudit* in Biarritz (1949), often deemed a cinephile touchstone, benefited from the support of the local tourism industry with its fair share of social events.⁴ In that respect, Locarno did not differ from its prestigious counterparts. However, unlike other festivals born during the same period, such as Venice (1932), Cannes (1939), Karlovy Vary (1946), or Berlin (1951), the Swiss event was neither created nor initially supported by political authorities or cultural institutions, but emerged, like the Edinburgh festival (1947), as a "grassroots celebration."⁵

Rather than considering this characteristic as a token of its cinephile virtue, this article will analyze how, contrary to other European film festivals trying to escape the state's grip, Locarno primarily struggled to become emancipated from the imperatives of the tourism and film industries by seeking the support of the government.⁶ Considering film festivals as "mixed spaces crossed by commercial interest, specialized film knowledge and tourist trajectories,"⁷ the following pages will analyze how the tensions between different stakeholders—particularly a tourist organization called Pro Locarno, as well as associations of film producers, distributors, and cinema operators—influenced the development of the LFF. To do so, this article will retrace the period during which the festival evolved from a small-scale, provincial celebration in the park of a nineteenth-century palace (the Grand Hotel) to an international platform for art house cinema with iconic open-air screenings in the city's main square (the Piazza Grande). As I will argue, the economic tutelage of the tourism and film industries had a determining influence on the inflections taken by the festival during its first thirty years, as it slowly and arduously specialized in art cinema in spite of the uncertain support from the Confederation.

The present historical examination, focused on the different groups affecting or affected by the LFF, draws its inspiration from the stakeholder theory.⁸ This theory, which has led to an important literature in management studies since its development in the 1980s,⁹ has increasingly

action : l'Etat, les professionnels, les publics (Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2011).

7. Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage, 2002), 60.

8. Ronald K. Mitchell, Bradley R. Agle, and Donna J. Wood, "Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Counts," *Academy of Management Review* 22, no. 4 (1997): 853–86.

9. R. Edward Freeman et al., *Stakeholder Theory. The State of the Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

10. Donna J. Wood et al., "Stakeholder Identification and Salience After 20 Years: Progress, Problems, and Prospects," *Business & Society* 60, no. 1 (2021): 196–245.

11. Lena Mossberg and Donald Getz, "Stakeholder Influences on the Ownership and Management of Festival Brands," *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 6, no. 4 (2006): 308–26; Montserrat Crespi-Vallbona and Greg Richards, "The Meaning of Cultural Festivals. Stakeholder Perspectives in Catalunya," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): 103–22; Can-Seng Ooi and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen, "City Branding and Film Festivals: Re-evaluating Stakeholder's Relations," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 6 (2010): 316–32; Yu-Chien Chang, "Creating Value Through the Performing Arts Festival: the Multi-Stakeholder Approach," *Journal of Macromarketing* 40, no. 2 (2020): 185–200.

12. Louis Todd, Anna Leask, and John Ensor, "Understanding Primary Stakeholders' Multiple Roles in Hallmark Event Tourism Management," *Tourism Management* 59 (2017): 494–509.

been used as a descriptive rather than a normative model in different research fields.¹⁰ It has become a particularly common tool in tourism studies, to analyze how hallmark events such as festivals contribute to place-marketing and city-branding processes.¹¹ To that end, researchers have particularly focused on the categorization of festival stakeholders—who generally assume multiple and changing roles¹²—as well as on their interactions, up to the point that these themes have sometimes been regarded as a subfield of festival studies.¹³ Conflicts caused by the opposing interests and asymmetrical power positions of festival stakeholders have thus been a major research issue,¹⁴ as have their mutual dependency and collaboration strategies.¹⁵

Similarly, with the aim of apprehending "the political and dynamic nature of relationships among event stakeholders,"¹⁶ the following pages provide new insights to the burgeoning field of film festival studies.¹⁷ Far from being autonomous entities, film festivals indeed work in collaboration with various actors defending their own interests, which are situated "at the intersection of art, commerce, technology, culture, identity, power, politics and ideology,"¹⁸ and hold asymmetrical and changing power positions.¹⁹ Contributing to the discussion about the cooperation and conflicts of hallmark events' stakeholders, this article aims at understanding how diverse agendas shaped the construction of one of the first major European film festivals created after the Second World War.

My reflection will be nourished by Donald Getz, Tommy Andersson, and Mia Larson's work on the resource dependency and legitimacy challenges of festivals,²⁰ in considering the two major stakeholders and suppliers of the Locarno Film Festival—the tourism and film industries—which provided it with financial, material, and symbolic resources. Through an examination of the interactions between these two groups and the LFF, I show how the festival's quest for legitimacy and survival was linked to a constant struggle for more autonomy from tourism promoters, film producers, distributors, and cinema owners, who were the founders of the event.

In so doing, this study fills a historiographical gap. Apart from some articles in edited volumes on the history of festivals,²¹ historical scholarship on film festival is scarce, especially compared to the number of books written or edited by film scholars,²² critics, journalists, or festival curators.²³ Moreover, these historical works, often focused on geopolitical, diplomatic, and ideological issues, tend to push economic issues into the background.²⁴ In this regard, this article sheds light on one of the lesser-known facets of postwar film festivals, which played a determining role in their foundation.

Despite a growing interest in the dynamic field of film festival studies since the publication of Marijke de Valck's *Film Festivals* (2007) and the *Film Festival Yearbooks* edited by Dina Iordanova (2009–present), only a couple of academic publications have been dedicated to the LFF.²⁵ Aside from the commemorative volumes edited by the festival itself²⁶ and the accounts of art historians,²⁷ only one article and an M.A. thesis have proposed a historical examination of the LFF.²⁸ Most of these publications have adopted a film history perspective, underlining, for example, which filmmakers or cinematographic movements were "discovered" in Locarno, with little interest in the external factors shaping the evolution of the festival.

In order to propose a contextual analysis of the LFF, this article relies on the archives of the

13. Sidsel Karlsen and Caroline Stenbacka Nordström, "Festivals in the Barents Region: Exploring Festival-Stakeholder Cooperation," *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 9, no. 2–3 (2009): 130–45; Getz Donald, "The Nature and Scope of Festival Studies," *International Journal of Event Management Research* 5, no. 1 (2010): 1–47.

14. M. Larson and E. Wikstrom, "Organizing Events: Managing Conflict and Consensus in a Political Market Square," *Event Management* 7 (2001): 51–65; M. Larson, "A Political Approach to Relationship Marketing: Case Study of the Storsjöyrän Festival," *International Journal of Tourism Research* 4, no. 2 (2002): 119–43.

15. Elise Truly Sautter and Birgit Leisen, "Managing Stakeholders. A Tourism Planning Model," *Annals of Tourism Research* 26, no. 2 (1999): 312–28; Tommy D. Andersson and Donald Getz, "Stakeholder Management Strategies of Festivals," *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism* 9, no. 3 (2008): 199–220.

16. Mia Larson, Donald Getz and Pantazis Pastras, "The Legitimacy of Festivals and Their Stakeholders: Concepts and Propositions," *Event Management* 19 (2015): 161.

17. Ragan Rhyne, "Film Festival Circuit and Stakeholders," in *The Festival Circuit*, ed. Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2009), 9–22; Christel Taillibert, "Les film festival studies, éléments pour une épistémologie d'un nouveau champ de recherche," *Diogenes* 2, nos. 258–60 (2017): 139–53; Olivier Moeschler and Olivier Thévenin, "Film Festivals: Metamorphosis of a Research Object and Field," *Society and Leisure* 44, no. 1 (2021): 1–9.

18. Charles-Clemens Rüling and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen, "Film Festival Research from

festival and the touristic organization Pro Locarno held by the Archivio di Stato in Bellinzona, as well as those of the professional film associations deposited at the Cinémathèque suisse (Swiss Film Archive) in Penthaaz.²⁹ It also uses sources from the federal administration, housed at the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern, and from the national and international press. The following pages first focus on the origins of the festival in 1946 and its early years, when it was still completely under the control of tourism promoters and subject to the goodwill of the film industry. Second, the article examines the crises that led to the cancellations of the 1951 and the 1956 editions, as the commercial interests of its main stakeholders started to hinder the event's cultural ambitions. Third, it analyzes how Locarno tried to escape economic constraints by specializing in emerging cinema despite the political conflicts generated by this decision. Finally, the article demonstrates how Locarno's radical choices in the late 1960s, made in hopes of becoming an alternative hub for new cinema, clashed with the agenda of the film and tourism industries, and how an equilibrium was eventually found during the 1970s.

In the Beginning was Tourism

Switzerland has been a popular tourist destination since the eighteenth century. Initially, it was mainly appreciated by British aristocrats who stopped there during their Grand Tour through Europe.³⁰ Then, in the nineteenth century, its attractiveness and accessibility developed with the construction of roads in alpine passes (Simplon, St. Bernard, St. Gothard) and tunnels through the mountains (especially the Gothard in 1882). The canton of Ticino, the southernmost canton of Switzerland situated almost entirely south of the Alps, benefited greatly from these communication routes. That is how, alongside the emergence of steamboat navigation on the Lake Maggiore and funicular railways in the surrounding mountains, the small city of Locarno turned into a seaside resort in the late century. Tourism progressively became central for this region capitalizing on its mild climate, Mediterranean landscapes, and Swiss tranquility.

In 1892, a few years after the building of a Grand Hotel for rich tourists (1876), a development society named Pro Locarno was founded by the local bourgeoisie (hotel and restaurants owners, bankers, lawyers, shopkeepers) with the aim of promoting the region and developing better infrastructures such as public parks, baths, and street lighting.³¹ In 1926, a young lawyer named Camillo Beretta was elected to the presidency of Pro Locarno and dynamized the organization by creating events such as the flower festival (*festa delle camellie*), which became very popular. To support the tourism industry and entertain travelers after the economic crisis of the 1930s and during the Second World War, Pro Locarno launched different initiatives under his leadership, such as the screening of educational movies.³²

Some years later, in June 1946, two members of Pro Locarno (Beretta and Riccardo Bolla) decided to join a few professionals from the movie industry—Vinicio Beretta (a film critic), André Mondini (the owner of Locarno's cinemas), and Giuseppe Padlina (of the distribution house Sefi Film)—to launch a new attraction: an international film festival. Rather than creating a new event, their idea consisted in moving an existing competition to Locarno, since the population of Lugano had just voted against the construction of an open theater to develop a festival created there a few years earlier.³³

an Organizational Studies Perspective," *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, no. 26 (2010): 319.

19. Mia Larson and Ewa Wikström, "Organizing Events: Managing Conflict and Consensus in a Political Market Square," *Event Management* 7 (2001): 51–65.

20. Donald Getz, Tommy Andersson, and Mia Larson, "Festival Stakeholder Roles: Concepts and Case Studies," *Event Management* 10 (2007): 103–22; Donald Getz and Tommy Andersson, "Festival Stakeholders: Exploring Relationships and Dependency Through a Four-Country Comparison," *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* 34, no. 4 (2010): 531–56.

21. Anne-Marie Autissier, ed., *L'Europe des festivals: de Zagreb à Édimbourg, points de vue croisés* (Paris: L'Attribut, 2009); Liana Giorgi, Monica Sassatelli, and Gerard Delanty, eds., *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Philippe Poirrier, ed., "Festivals & sociétés en Europe (XIXe-XXIe siècles)," *Territoires contemporains*, no. 3 (2012), accessed June 23, 2022, http://tristan.u-bourgogne.fr/CGC/publications/Festivals_societes/Festivals.html; Anaïs Fléchet et al., *Une histoire des festivals: XXe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013).

22. Richard Porton, ed., *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals* (London: Wallflower, 2009); Cindy Hing-yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Lesley-Ann Dickson, "Film Festival and Cinema Audiences: A Study of Exhibition Practice and Audience Reception at Glasgow Film Festival" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2014); Mar Diestodópidio, "Film Festivals: Cinema and Cultural Exchange" (PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2014); Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, eds., *Film*

Set in the park of the Grand Hotel, the Locarno festival became a successful tourist attraction, with numerous social events extending over eleven days (see table 1).³⁴ Its outdoor cinema, equipped with a screen of eight-by-seven meters and twelve hundred seats (which quickly increased to fifteen hundred and then two thousand) was at that time the largest in Europe. In the official leaflet programs, tourism occupied most of the advertising space, informing visitors that the region was an "ideal vacation resort for all seasons" with its numerous sports clubs, bars and restaurants, concerts, transports, casinos, and luxury boutiques.³⁵

TABLE 1. Duration of the Festival

YEAR	NUMBER OF DAYS
1946	11 days
1947	14 days
1948	12 days
1949	10 days
1950-55	11 days
1957	9 days
1958	16 days
1959-60	11 days
1961-65	12 days
1966	9 days
1967	10 days
1968-70	11 days
1971	10 days
1972-75	11 days
1976	14 days
1977	11 days

After the success of the first edition, the length of the festival was extended to 14 days. It would later stabilize around 11 days, except for the 1958 edition, when Locarno became an A-ranked festival.

In addition to the cocktail parties, receptions, beauty contests, and fashion shows, excursions to the surrounding valleys and the islands on Lake Maggiore were part of the program. While local newspapers published a social register compiling all the anecdotes and small scandals of the festival, the national and international press unanimously praised the Mediterranean climate and romantic scenery of Locarno. It was no coincidence, since, after Venice and Cannes, many others film festivals would be created on rivieras—Pesaro (Italy), Punta del Este (Uruguay), San Sebastian (Spain), Pula (Yugoslavia), and Antalya (Turkey)—or in spa towns such as Karlovy Vary (Czechoslovakia). In Locarno, despite a program featuring movies from John Ford, Billy Wilder, René Clair, Roberto Rossellini, and Sergei Eisenstein, the early editions of the festival were primarily aimed at promoting the region rather than cinema. In 1948, Alfredo Fanciola (a member of Pro Locarno and one of several hotel owners on the executive committee of the festival) even mentioned that the development of the festival should not put the local flower festival—a purely

Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice (New York: Routledge, 2016); Aida Vallejo and María Paz Peirano, *Film Festivals and Anthropology* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017); Tricia Jenkins, ed., *International Film Festivals: Contemporary Cultures and History Beyond Venice and Cannes* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018).

23. Kenneth Turan, *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Stéphanie Torche, "Les logiques économiques et culturelles des festivals de films: analyse et représentation" (PhD diss., University of Fribourg, 2008); Matthew Llyod, *How the Movie Brats Took Over Edinburgh: The Impact of Cinephilia on the Edinburgh International Film Festival, 1968–1980* (St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2011).

24. Stefano Pisu, *Stalin a Venezia: l'URSS alla Mostra del cinema fra diplomazia culturale e scontro ideologico (1932–1953)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013); Andreas Kötzing and Caroline Moine, eds., *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts: Film Festivals in the Cold War* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2017); Caroline Moine, *Screened Encounters: The Leipzig Documentary Film Festival, 1955–1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018); Heide Fehrenbach, "The Berlin International Film Festival: Between Cold War Politics and Postwar Reorientation" and Jindřiška Bláhová, "Political Significance of a Butcher in Love: The 1956 Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, Marty (1955) and the Restoration of Contact between Hollywood and Czechoslovakia during the Cold War," *Studies in European Cinema* 17, no. 2 (2020): 81–96 and 97–112.

25. Francesco Casetti and Giuseppe Richeri, *L'impatto culturale del Festival internazionale del film Locarno* (Lugano: Istituto media e giornalismo, 2004); Rico Maggi, ed., *Impatti economici e potenziali strategici del Festival internazionale del film Locarno* (Lugano: Istituto di ricerche economiche, 2005).

touristic event—in the shade.³⁶

Initially, Locarno heavily relied on the professional and personal networks of vice-president Mondini with (mainly American) film distributors, and particularly on his relations with Fernand Reyrens, director of the 20th Century Fox branch in Switzerland.³⁷ At first, only movies that were commercially distributed in the country could be screened in Locarno.³⁸ In fact, film distributors exerted such an important influence on the festival that they pressured it not to organize a competition until the late 1950s (with the exception of the 1949 edition). This constraint was also imposed by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF), the "king-maker of the international film festival circuit,"³⁹ which considered Switzerland a market too small to be commercially interesting.⁴⁰

From an artistic point of view, Locarno did not have a very good reputation during its first years because almost all its stakeholders were driven by economic interests. If cinema operators regularly praised the festival as a meeting point for professionals in the movie industry, journalists and film critics often accused it of lacking "a sense of culture" and a real vision of cinema.⁴¹ The French film magazine *L'Écran français* even called Locarno, a third of whose program was composed of Hollywood productions,⁴² a mere "trade show."⁴³ Just like Cannes in its early days,⁴⁴ Locarno was deemed too superficial, too mercantile, too "commercial," and not sufficiently "cinephile" in cultural circles.⁴⁵

Because the selection commission was mostly composed of people "linked to the interests of the film industry,"⁴⁶ the LFF was generally depicted as being under the "tutelage" of the movie industry.⁴⁷ Film critics and cinephiles also regretted that the most interesting parts of the program (*films d'auteur*, documentaries, and special sections such as the retrospective) were shown in the mornings and afternoons at local cinemas (while locals were working and tourists sightseeing), and that the most commercial movies were screened at hotels in the evenings, as pure entertainment products. As for Swiss distributors, they became more and more reluctant to take part in the festival, for fear that their products would be harshly criticized by the international press.⁴⁸

Because attendance at the outdoor screenings depended on good weather, the festival often suffered severe financial losses. This situation was especially delicate since, during the first three years of the festival, Pro Locarno organized it "alone and without any financial help from the local authorities."⁴⁹ That is why in 1949, in order to diversify its funding sources and hopefully gain more independence and legitimacy, the festival became an association of its own, legally separated from Pro Locarno.⁵⁰ Although the ties between the two organizations remained extremely tight, this formal separation allowed the festival to ask for public subsidies.⁵¹

The Crises of the 1950s

Despite this new departure under favorable auspices, the LFF encountered several difficulties in the early 1950s. These crises, mostly caused by conflicts with the profit-driven film industry, illustrated the progressive arrival of a new stakeholder in the organization of the event: the

26. Guglielmo Volonterio, *Per uno spazio autonomo: Festival internazionale del film di Locarno* (Locarno: Festival di Locarno, 1977); Martin Schlappner et al., *Festival internazionale del film Locarno: 40 ans. Six essais critiques* (Locarno: Festival international du film, 1987); and Roland Cosandey et al., *Festival internazionale del film Locarno: 40 ans. Chronique et filmographie* (Locarno: Festival international du film, 1988); Frédéric Maire and Patrizia Pesko, *10 ans, 1988–1997* (Locarno: Festival international du film, 1997); Lorenzo Buccella, ed., *Forever Young: Festival del Film Locarno 1997–2012* (Locarno: Festival del film Locarno, 2014); *Sguardi oltre il cinema. Critical Essays on the Locarno Film Festival* (Locarno: Armando Dadò, 2022); Lorenzo Buccella, *Locarno on /Locarno off. Storia e storie del Film Festival* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 2022).

27. Dalmazio Ambrosioni, *Locarno città del cinema: i cinquant'anni del Festival internazionale del film* (Locarno: Armando Dadò, 1998); Guglielmo Volonterio, *Dalle suggestioni del Parco alla grande festa del cinema: storia del Festival di Locarno, 1946–1997* (Venice: Marsilio, 1997); Domenico Lucchini and Gregory Catella, *Un festival libero: una storia del cinema attraverso i film del Festival di Locarno* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2004).

28. John Wäfler, "The Surveillance of Film Festivals in Switzerland: The Case of the Locarno International Film Festival," in *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts*, ed. Kötzing and Moine, 141–52; Lucia Leoni, "Le Festival international du film de Locarno: entre culture internationale et politique nationale (1946–1971)" (MA thesis, University of Fribourg, 2020).

29. Contacted by email, the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF) declined the author's request to access its archives.

30. Patrick Vincent, *La Suisse vue par les écrivains de langue anglaise* (Lausanne: Savoir suisse, 2009); and Patrick Vincent, ed., "Les voyageurs

federal state. The first of these incidents was the cancellation of the 1951 edition, caused by a lack of funding to restore the Kursaal Cinema, one of the three movie theaters in Locarno. The renovation was demanded by film distributors, who required better screening conditions for their products.⁵² Mainly due to a lack of public backing at the local level, not enough funds could be found in time, and the construction works could only be finished in 1953. More dramatically, the absence of political support at the national level was duly noted by the omnipotent FIAPF, which controlled (and limited) the number of film festivals with its four-category ranking system: A (competitive international film festivals), B (noncompetitive international film festivals), C (competitive specialized film festivals) and D (noncompetitive national film festivals).

After the introduction of this classification in the early 1950s, members of the FIAPF were asked to boycott festivals that did not follow the federation's regulations, thus depriving them of their most crucial assets, the movies. One of the requirements to join Venice and Cannes in the A-list was for the festivals to send invitations to film-producing countries via diplomatic channels. In the case of Switzerland, this would have been official letters from the Federal Political Department (i.e., Foreign Affairs Ministry), transmitted via Swiss embassies abroad. For the festival, this solution would have meant liberation from the tutelage of the distributors and the possibility of establishing a program based on more artistic considerations. Unfortunately for Locarno, the Swiss government refused to do so in order not to give the festival some sort of officiality.⁵³ Consequently, one year after being ranked B, like the newly founded Berlinale, the LFF was downgraded to the D rank in 1953, following the creation of the B-ranked San Sebastian festival. This sanction deprived Locarno from having an international jury, prizes, and, most importantly, world premieres, which meant far less publicity from the mass media and less interest from the specialized press.

This setback triggered a reaction in Bern. The Federal Council, which refused to plead the festival's cause to the FIAPF because it was an institution "of private nature," charged Oscar Düby (representing Swiss producers in the federation) to support the festival from within.⁵⁴ More importantly, the government recognized Locarno as an event of national significance in 1954, which meant that Swiss distributors could then import movies out of their annual quota specifically for the festival.⁵⁵ Thanks to this incentive measure, which was a requirement of the FIAPF, the festival hoped to receive more interesting films from the distributors.

However, fearing bad reviews from the press, distributors were still reluctant to send their products to Ticino,⁵⁶ except for the movies that could easily entertain the evening spectators in the park of the Grand Hotel.⁵⁷ Therefore, foreign film magazines criticized the fact that Locarno "remained a film fair for the use of distributors and cinema directors [and that] commercial value ... constantly [took] precedence over artistic criteria. [Considering] the organizers [as] too nice and docile people [they suggested to choose] between the film merchants and the public of cinephiles."⁵⁸ Some film critics pointed out that the festival was "under the control and influence of cinema exhibitors, who [were] largely represented on the executive committee and the selection committee."⁵⁹ Yet, rather than intervening with the Swiss distributors and cinema operators, the Federal Chamber of Cinema suggested that film critics could be instructed "not to exaggerate in their comments, so as not to unnecessarily discourage those among the film distributors who will want to collaborate in the success of the event."⁶⁰ It then seemed important

anglais en Suisse," *Bulletin de l'Association culturelle pour le voyage en Suisse*, no. 14 (2011): 7–8..

31. Stefano Sulmoni, "Pro Lugano: una società al servizio della promozione turistica nella Lugano della Belle Époque (1888–1920)" (MA thesis, University of Fribourg, 2005).

32. Correspondence between Pro Locarno and the Bund Schweizerischer Kulturfilm-Gemeinden, 1942–45, C1, 3.1.15 (Festival internazionale del film di Locarno), Archivio di Stato del Cantone Ticino, Bellinzona, Switzerland (hereafter ASCT). The first film club of Ticino was founded in 1947; see Stefano Mordasini, "La nascita e lo sviluppo dell'esercizio cinematografico in Ticino (1896–1946)" (MA thesis, University of Fribourg, 1999)..

33. The local Pro Lugano and some distributors and cinema operators had created this festival of Italian movies in 1941. It became an international film festival in 1944.

34. For the daytime program, and in case of bad weather in the evenings, screenings took place in the local cinemas owned by André Mondini.

35. Programs of the festival (1946–71), ST1, 2.1.15, ASCT.

36. Minutes of the general assembly of Pro Locarno, January 29, 1948, box 45, 2.2.80 (Alfonsito Varini), ASCT.

37. As *Cahiers du cinéma* wrote a couple of years later, Locarno was then "abandoned to the directors of the American Agencies in Switzerland who judged according to their taste [and to] the powerful Association of Film Distributors in Switzerland, which by privilege has the sole right to screen any film on the territory of the Confederation." Pierre Michaut, "A Berlin et à Locarno: quelques films," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 38 (1954): 33.

38. Only a small portion of the movies were proposed to the festival by foreign embassies in Bern.

to Bern not to upset the film industry.

In 1956, a new hard blow to the festival illustrated the incapacity of the state to support Locarno against economic stakeholders. Initially, the incident started as a commercial dispute about the rental price of movies in Switzerland between Swiss distributors and Italian, French, and German producers ("contractual restrictions for the free exploitation of films shown at the Festival, established by the Swiss distributors"⁶¹). When the latter considered that no satisfactory agreement could be found, the FIAPF sided with members (despite Düby's advocacy for the festival) and decided not to recognize Locarno, as a retaliatory measure.⁶² Therefore, the festival was cancelled for the second time in its history. The federation's decision greatly surprised the Swiss authorities, which denounced the FIAPF's confusion of a private commercial conflict with a public national event.⁶³

Bern also failed to support the festival against attacks from the movie industry against its new strategy, which consisted in seeking cultural legitimacy and economic autonomy by selecting movies coming from socialist countries (or, as the festival put it, "films produced by countries that are not, for reasons unknown to us, at Cannes or Venice"⁶⁴). If this daring choice was praised by foreign film magazines such as the *Cahiers du cinéma*,⁶⁵ the very conservative Swiss movie industry protested against what it considered worthless communist propaganda by leaving Locarno's patronage committee.⁶⁶ Interestingly, when Venice and Cannes also tried to gain some independence from the film industry in the selection of movies during the same period, the FIAPF reacted by admitting Berlin and Karlovy Vary in the A category, thus depriving the two major film festivals of their privilege.⁶⁷ As for the Swiss authorities, they simply suggested that Locarno select fewer movies from the Eastern bloc.

The second cancellation of the festival triggered a new reaction from the government. In 1957, the Film Section of the Federal Department of Home Affairs finally dared writing to the FIAPF, asking the federation not to do anything detrimental to the festival.⁶⁸ Locarno could thus take place that year despite not being recognized by the FIAPF. In 1959, the LFF finally earned the A-rank, two years after San Sebastian and the same year as Moscow. Among the requirements of the FIAPF, Locarno was forced to change its dates to late July (see table 2)—the peak of the tourist season—despite the heavy pressure that this decision would place on the local hotels. Fortunately for the LFF, the tourism industry was still very keen on supporting it.

TABLE 2. Dates of the Festival

YEAR	DATES
1946	22 August–1 September
1947	26 June–9 July
1948	1–12 July
1949	8–17 July
1950	29 June–9 July
1952	3–13 July
1953	2–12 July

39. Dorota Ostrowska, "Producers' Playground: the British Film Producers Association and International Film Festivals in the Post-war Period," *Studies in European Cinema* 17, no. 2 (2020): 130..

40. Founded in 1933 and revived in 1948, the FIAPF promoted the free international circulation of movies, especially after the arrival of the Motion Picture Association of America as a member. Film festivals were initially seen as a good tool for this purpose, but as they proliferated, the federation established a categorization system in 1951 to restrict the events that could hold previews and competitions via a certification system. Caroline Moine, "La Fédération internationale des associations de producteurs de films : un acteur controversé de la promotion du cinéma après 1945," *Le Mouvement social* 2, no. 243 (2013): 91–103.

41. Virgilio Gilardoni, "Il terzo Festival internazionale del Film," *Il Lavoratore*, July 10, 1948, 2.

42. However, it should be noted that on the whole, distributors of American movies in Switzerland never became actively involved in the festival, since it was not considered a commercially interesting place.

43. Jean-Charles Tacchella and Jean Thévenot, "Locarno a inauguré la saison des festivals," *L'Ecran français*, July 13, 1948, 4.

44. Pierre-Jean Benghozi and Claire Nénert, "Création de valeur artistique ou économique: du Festival International du film de Cannes au marché du film," *Recherche et Applications en Marketing* 10, no. 4 (1995): 65–76.

45. Memo from the festival to federal councilor Philipp Etter, August 23, 1955, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT.

46. Jean Nicollier, "Après le Festival de Locarno 1948," *Journal de Genève*, August 14, 1948, 9

47. Letter from Bolla to Calgari, May

TABLE 2. Dates of the Festival

YEAR	DATES
1954	1–11 July
1955	9–19 July
1957	6–14 July
1958	26 July–10 August
1959	9–19 Julys
1960	21–31 July
1961	19–30 July
1962	18–29 July
1963	17–28 July
1964	22 July–2 August
1965	21 July–1 August
1966	23–31 July
1967	22–31 July
1968	26 September–6 October
1969	2–12 October
1970	24 September–4 October
1971	6–15 August
1972	3–13 August
1973	2–12 August
1974	1–11 August
1975	31 July–10 August
1976	2–15 August
1977	4–14 August

After a first edition set toward the end of the tourist season, the dates of the festival were stabilized in early July until 1958, when the FIAPF imposed its displacement in late July as part of a reorganization of the global film festivals calendar. It then progressively moved toward early August (its current dates), except for the 1968–70 editions, set in autumn to attract more young spectators (mainly students).

After the cancellation of the 1951 and the 1956 editions, one of the driving forces behind the festival's survival was indeed Pro Locarno. Given the economic importance of the event for the region, the tourist organization's worst fear was that another town would "steal" it, as Locarno tourism promoters originally had done with Lugano.⁶⁹ In the 1950s, a great part of the management board of the festival was still composed of people representing the interests of Pro Locarno, which loaned 40,000 CHF to the festival (~170,000 Euros today) and provided one-third of its subventions. That explains why the association had no qualms asking:

Who wanted the festival? Pro Locarno. Who made huge sacrifices to create it and make it a very effective

14, 1954, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT.

48. Viktor Zwicky, "Nach dem Filmfestival von Locarno," *Schweizer Film Suisse*, no. 11/12 (September 1949): 1–3.

49. Minutes of the general assembly of the executive committee of the festival, January 11, 1949, box 45, 2.2.80, ASCT.

50. Comparatively, Cannes was formally created as an independent association a couple of years earlier, while the Berlin film festival only became one in 1969.

51. Aside from the city of Locarno, the surrounding villages, and the canton of Ticino, other financial support came from hoteliers, transport societies, casinos, banks, et cetera. Because there was no federal law on cinema in Switzerland before 1963, the government was not legally able to support the festival financially until then.

52. Letter from the festival to the Association of film distributors in Switzerland, April 12, 1950, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT.

53. Letter from the Federal Political Department to the Department of Education of Ticino, February 8, 1951, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT.

54. Düby, who directed several Swiss production houses such as Praesens (1946–50, 195–57), Gloriafilm (1951–54) and Unitas-Films (1958–59), later directed the Film Section of the Federal Department of Home Affairs (1963–69) and the Federal Film Commission (1970–74). Letter from the Federal Department of Home Affairs to the festival, November 12, 1954, V4, 3.1.15.

55. Beginning in 1938, the import of feature films in Switzerland was subject to a quota to limit the monopoly of big foreign companies (mainly American) and the diffusion of propaganda from Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the USSR. The quota was lifted in 1992. Gianni Haver, ed., *Le cinéma au pas: les productions*

means of propaganda for Locarno? Pro Locarno. Who still organizes the festival today? Pro Locarno. From whom does the main financial contribution to the event come after that of the [canton]? Pro Locarno. Who owns the material that the festival uses? Pro Locarno. Does Pro Locarno really have the voice it deserves on the festival's boards?⁷⁰

Benefiting from the official support of the Confederation but subject to the goodwill of the film and the tourism industries, the festival was then increasingly caught between the cultural and artistic ambitions of leading figures such as Vinicio Beretta (secretary since 1953 and the main initiator of Locarno's shift toward movies from the Eastern bloc), and the conservative views of distributors, cinema operators, and "the local bourgeoisie" ensuring its economic survival.⁷¹

If on the one hand, the festival began organizing highly acclaimed retrospectives in collaboration with the Swiss Cinémathèque to improve its cinephile reputation,⁷² on the other hand, it proved difficult "to silence the criticism that the Locarno festival ha[d] no other purpose than to offer the *forestiero* [tourist] a form of entertainment out of the ordinary."⁷³ The event, extended to sixteen days to please tourism promoters (the longest edition yet; see table 1), was still forced to select movies attracting wide audiences to ensure the economic viability of the open-air screenings. While the Swiss media still showed Locarno as a mainly tourist event—with starlets water skiing on Lake Maggiore—without any real comment on the movies in competition,⁷⁴ the organizers increasingly felt like "the staff of a 'palace' in a big Swiss city, who [did] everything to make the stay pleasant for the guests."⁷⁵ This uncomfortable situation, resulting from a growing discrepancy between the interests of the different stakeholders, would only find a fragile (and ephemeral) equilibrium in the early 1960s.

Seeking an Identity

After some tensions with the film and tourism industries in the 1950s, the following decade was a time for compromises in Locarno. This appeasement resulted from, among other factors, the nomination of a politician as the president of the festival. Enrico Franzoni, mayor of the neighboring town of Muralto (1952–63) and national councilor (1959–75), was chosen in 1957 in the hope that he could defend and support the LFF in Bern. Similarly, several members of the management board of the festival had a political career at the national level. For an event that was frequently subjugated to private economic interests because of its lack of officiality, this new political network certainly weighed in the FIAPF's decision to rank Locarno in the A category in 1959.

Additionally, during the transition from the 1950s to the 1960s, another key supporter of the festival was Oscar Düby. The Swiss became the FIAPF's general secretary in 1959 and later directed the Film Section of the Federal Department of Home Affairs (1963–69), a strategic position that undoubtedly benefited Locarno amid the growing competition between international film festivals. Düby functioned as a mediator who helped the LFF find its own way by specializing in "new cinema" (the first and second movies of young filmmakers). One year before Cannes introduced its "*Semaine de la critique*" (an alternative selection for more independent films) and four years before Berlin adopted a similar solution, Locarno decided, by mutual agreement with the FIAPF, to be divided into two parallel sections: a competitive one (held in the afternoon for experimental movies and avant-garde cinema) and a noncompetitive one (held in the evening

des pays autoritaires et leur impact en Suisse (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2004) ; Letter from the Swiss Association for the Development of Cinematographic Culture to the festival, December 30, 1954, V4, 3.1.15, ASCT..

56. Hugo Mauerhofer, "Eine neue Formel für Locarno?," *Schweizer Film Suisse*, no. 2 (December 1954): 15.

57. Memo from the festival to federal councilor Etter, August 23, 1955, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT, 3.1.15.

58. Colette Borde, "Locarno," *Cinéma*, no. 40 (1959): 34.

59. Guido Aristarco, "Il festival che era tranquillo," *Cinema nuovo*, no. 40, May 1, 1954, 73.

60. Minutes of the Federal Chamber of Cinema, May 2, 1957, box 12, CSL11, Archives of the Swiss Cinémathèque, Penthaz, Switzerland (hereafter Cin).

61. Letter from Oscar Dübby to the festival, May 3, 1956, C5, 3.1.15, ASCT.

62. Foreign producers also boycotted Swiss distributors to pressure them to abandon their mutual agreement to pay less for imported films. According to Dübby, the FIAPF also disapproved of the fact that the LFF had been extended to eleven days since 1950, and believed that "in addition to Venice, Cannes and Berlin, a fourth major international show [was] not justified in view of the small number of festival-worthy films." Minutes of the Federal Chamber of Cinema, January 26, 1956, box 12, CSL11, Cin.

63. Letter from the Swiss Chamber of Cinema to the FIAPF, May 3, 1956, C5, 3.1.15, ASCT.

64. Letter from the festival to the FIAPF, July 11, 1955, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT.

65. Pierre Michaut, "A Berlin et à Locarno: quelques films," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 38 (1954): 33–34; and Pierre Michaut, "De Berlin à Locarno," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 51 (1955): 30.

66. In 1956, after the crushing of the

for more conventional or "classic" movies). This compromise seemed to please both the film industry (showing its latest productions to a large audience) and the tourism industry (attracting the attention of the media with prizes and appealing to tourists with open-air screenings), as well as cinephiles looking for cinematographic discoveries. The latter even recognized that Locarno had become "more than a simple tourist attraction [thanks to] the independence that preside[d] over the choice of the films presented."⁷⁶

TABLE 3. Directors and Presidents of the Festival (1946–77)

DIRECTORS	PRESIDENTS
Riccardo Bolla (1946–58)	Camillo Beretta (1946–55)
Vinicio Beretta (1960–65)	Enrico Franzoni (1957–62)
Sandro Bianconi (1966–70) and Freddy Buache (1967–70)	Fernando Gaja (1963–68)
Commission of 7 members (1971)	Luciano Giudici (1970–80)
Moritz de Hadeln (1972–77)	

While presidents were generally consensual and respected personalities not specialized in cinema (a kind of moral caution with representative but also concrete operational functions), directors were the active managers of the event, adopting a particular orientation depending on their artistic vision. In 1971, a transition edition was directed by an ensemble of local personalities.

In 1960, Vinicio Beretta, who already had been a very active secretary since 1953, became the new director of Locarno. Like Luigi Chiarini in Venice, this journalist really paved the way to the internationalization, professionalization, and transformation of the festival into a meeting point for cinephiles with an artistic taste for avant-garde cinema. While some regretted the absence of celebrities to arouse the tourist's curiosity in Ticino under his leadership,⁷⁷ films critics began to praise Locarno's selection commission,⁷⁸ which finally made more artistically daring choices to promote young filmmakers instead of "society events, stardom or starlet shows."⁷⁹

Having gained cultural legitimacy with its special programs and lectures such as "*Cinema e Gioventù*" (Cinema and Youth), supported by the cantonal Department of Education and placed under the patronage of UNESCO, Locarno finally received organizational and financial support from the Swiss government in the early 1960s. After having granted the LFF its moral support in 1954, the Confederation agreed to transmit official invitations to the festival to foreign countries via diplomatic channels in 1961. More importantly, it granted Locarno its first federal subvention of 20,000 CHF in 1963 (~75,000 Euros today).⁸⁰ But when the festival definitively decided to specialize in new cinema, renewed tensions with the film and tourism industries arose.

One of the innovations that raised concern was Locarno's close collaboration with Freddy Buache. In addition to his reputation as a left-wing agitator, the director of the Swiss Cinémathèque was suspected by Swiss distributors and cinema operators of wanting to set up an alternative distribution network. Buache indeed helped Beretta import films he had seen at other festivals such as Karlovy Vary and Moscow. Consequently, more and more movies selected in Locarno came from the other side of the Iron Curtain or from then-called Third World countries.⁸¹ Because of the low commercial potential of these films, which were highly popular in

Hungarian Revolution, Swiss cinema operators even called for a boycott of any movie coming from the Eastern bloc. This decision was widely respected because of the strong cartelization of the film market in the country ("Keine kommunistischen Filme in der Schweiz," *Schweizer Film Suisse*, no. 11 [November 1956]: 5). On Swiss anticommunism, see, for example, Michel Caillat et al., eds., *Histoire(s) de l'anticommunisme en Suisse* (Zürich: Chronos, 2009); and Luc van Dongen et al., eds., *Transnational Anti-communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

67. Stefano Pisu, "A Transnational Love-Hate Relationship: the FIAPF and the Venice and Cannes Film Festivals (1950-1970)," in *International Film Festivals: Contemporary Cultures and History Beyond Venice and Cannes*, ed. Tricia Jenkins (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 122.

68. Letter from the Film Section of the Federal Department of Home Affairs to the FIAPF, March 23, 1957, V4, 3.1.15, ASCT.

69. Report by the organizational committee of the festival, January 1953, box 47, 2.2.80, ASCT.

70. Internal document of the festival, 1956, C5, 3.1.15, ASCT.

71. Freddy Buache, "Renouvellement dans la continuité," in *40 ans*, 45.

72. Among the first were Akira Kurosawa (1957), Ingmar Bergman (1959), Luis Buñuel (1960), Fritz Lang (1961), Jean Vigo (1962), and John Ford (1963).

73. Letter from the festival to the FIAPF, March 30, 1956, C5, 3.1.15, ASCT.

74. Excerpts from the *Ciné-Journal Suisse* can be found online at <https://memobase.ch/fr/recordSet/bar-001..>

75. Memo from the festival to Philipp Etter, August 23, 1955, C6, 3.1.15, ASCT.

film clubs, the Swiss film industry showed a certain disinterest in them.⁸² Sharing Pro Locarno's fear that these movies would alienate tourists,⁸³ cinema operators threatened to create their own international film festival in Zurich, thereby reviving antagonism between commercial and cultural interests.⁸⁴

In addition to these economic and artistic disputes, Locarno was once again the target of violent political attacks from anticommunist distributors and film critics for selecting movies coming from the Eastern bloc. Having drawn lessons from its past, the festival then knew that the situation required an intervention from the state. In reaction to these polemics, the Social Democrat home affairs minister, Hans-Peter Tschudi, suspended state collaboration in the transmission of invitations via diplomatic channels and suggested that Locarno program less "subversive" movies. Faced with persistent criticism, he then proposed a more constructive solution: the creation of a "national" selection commission that would include some of the festival's most ardent detractors from among the ranks of distributors and cinema operators.⁸⁵ Even if Beretta believed that the film industry sought to "practically control the festival," the director accepted this compromise, which allowed Locarno to pacify its relations with these strategic stakeholders.⁸⁶

Yet tensions with Pro Locarno were also revived when the tourist organization imposed some structural reforms to the event as a condition for its financial support.⁸⁷ Among these measures was the improvement of the receptions organized for guests and better public relations/advertising campaigns for the festival. Most importantly, Pro Locarno explained that, in order to assure some revenue during the costly open-air screenings, more "spectacular" films attracting wide audiences should always be part of the program, since the park of the Grand Hotel was equipped with two thousand seats. Henceforth more inclined to negotiate with the aging and weakened tourist office,⁸⁸ the LFF promised to respect "touristic requirements" in the selection of movies.⁸⁹ That was when a highly sensitive topic was finally addressed by the executive committee of the festival: the outdoor cinema in the park of the Grand Hotel.

For several years, the rental price of the palace had been increasing substantially. In constant financial straits, the festival thus naturally considered giving up the open-air screenings to save money. For most cinephile leaders, this would have also represented an opportunity to give a new direction to the LFF, by definitively breaking with its touristic origins. Immediately, Pro Locarno, which considered tourism to be the event's trademark, explained that this solution would represent a first step toward the end of the festival, and that other sectors should cut their expenses first.⁹⁰ A first formal proposal to cease the partnership with the hotel was unanimously refused by the executive commission of the festival, which was still composed of many members of the tourist organization.⁹¹ Just a few months later, the festival decided to leave the park of the Grand Hotel, whose owner's financial demands were deemed too high.⁹² A new era then began for Locarno, with new directors hoping that the improved relationships with the film and tourism industries would give them room for maneuver to implement their conception of a festival entirely conceived for cinephiles.

76. Gene Moskowitz, "Locarno,"
Cinéma, no. 60 (1961): 50.

77. Letter from Elite Film to the
festival, May 6, 1960, MF10, 3.1.15,
ASCT.

78. Freddy Landry, "Locarno inaugure
aujourd'hui son XIème Festival
international du film," *Feuille d'Avis de
Neuchâtel*, September 9, 1959, 1, 9.

79. Letter from Buache to the
newspaper *Le Peuple*, August 8, 1960,
MF12, 3.1.15, ASCT.

80. That year, Pro Locarno gave
31,000 CHF to the festival in
subventions (~ 115,000 Euros today).

81. Between 1946 and 1950,
American, Italian, French, British, and
West German films represented 81
percent of the main program of the
festival. This share fell to 66 percent
between 1952 and 1957, 52 percent
between 1958 and 1962, and 36
percent between 1963 and 1965.

82. Freddy Buache, *Derrière l'écran:
entretiens avec Christophe Gallaz et
Jean-François Amiguet* (Lausanne:
L'Âge d'Homme, 2009), 177.

83. Minutes of the executive
commission of the festival, December
23, 1961, C4, 3.1.15, ASCT.

84. Interestingly, the Zurich Film
Festival created in 2005 has also been
described as a competitor to Locarno.
Skadi Loist, "The Film Festival
Circuit: Networks, Hierarchies, and
Circulation," in *Film Festivals*, 49–64.

85. Cyril Cordoba, "The Locarno
Film Festival under the Influence?
Programming Eastern European
Movies in Anticomunist Switzerland
(1946–62)," *Contemporary European
History*, 2022, [https://doi.org/10.1017/
S0960777322000650](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000650).

86. Letter from Beretta to Freddy
Landry, September 27, 1961, V&, 3.1.15, ASCT.

87. In 1965, the organization once
again loaned 35,000 CHF to the
festival (~ 250,000 Euros today).

An Ephemeral Breakaway

Despite having gained state support and recognition within cinephile circles during the 1950s and 1960s, Locarno still had to engage in a power struggle with its two main stakeholders (the tourism and film industries) to follow its path. The new identity given to the festival by Sandro Bianconi (scholar, movie critic, and leader of the local film club) and Freddy Buache marked a big break with tradition.⁹³ In addition to the decision to leave the Grand Hotel and show movies only in local cinemas, the directors changed the dates of the festival from summer to fall (see table 2), a decision appealing to apprentices as well as high school and university students. This radical shift of the festival, entirely specialized in the first or second films of young moviemakers, unsurprisingly displeased Pro Locarno, which accused the directors of organizing a festival for film critics only. The Swiss film distributors and cinema operators also completely lost interest in what they called an "anti-economic" ghetto and an "anti-festival,"⁹⁴ whose "elitism" they considered contradictory to the financial support provided by the Confederation.⁹⁵ They depicted it as "a fiasco ... dominated by rowdy youths" and regretted that the two codirectors were "anti-business."⁹⁶

Additionally, the FIAPF, noting "a significant drop in interest" in film festivals except for Cannes and Moscow, prevented Locarno from devoting its program to then-called Third World cinema because another city (whose name was not mentioned) was already considering this option. As it reminded Bianconi, "it was for refusing to devote himself solely to [new cinema] that your predecessor was unable to rectify the situation at Locarno."⁹⁷ Therefore, the LFF was constrained in its specialization and was forced to abandon the competition in 1966 and 1967, in compliance with Düby's instructions. In 1968, the festival regained the right to organize an international competition devoted to "new world cinema," a convoluted way to combine its interest in both young filmmakers and then-called Third World movies. But that year, Switzerland did not escape the protests that had previously shaken Cannes, Berlin, and Venice,⁹⁸ and the jury eventually resigned and handed over the responsibility of giving awards to the youth jury, created a couple of years before.⁹⁹

Besides this political unrest, what caused the resignation of both directors after the 1970 edition was the growing pressure from the tourism industry. Under their leadership, Pro Locarno regretted not only the significant decrease in the number of spectators, but also the fact that most of them were students, an audience less likely to stay in expensive hotels, eat in fancy restaurants, and spend their money in luxury stores. The tourist office first asked Bianconi and Buache to put things back on an even keel by selecting movies that could attract wider audiences,¹⁰⁰ knowing that it could not reasonably convince them to reinstate all the society events and the touristic excursions they had previously suppressed.¹⁰¹

As for Düby, who explained that another festival (most likely Pesaro, created in 1965) was about to "become, with substantial financial resources, the intellectual, artistic and professional center of tomorrow's cinema," his support for the LFF inside the federal administration became rather evanescent. During his meetings with the Federal Film Commission, he did not contradict the criticism that Locarno was too unstable. That is why Bianconi and Buache considered it "wise to obey Düby on certain points in order to better preserve [their] freedom of maneuver on others."¹⁰²

88. Pro Locarno was indeed facing some internal rivalries following the departure of Camillo Beretta from the presidency; see newspaper articles from December 1965 to September 1966, box 36, 2.2.80, ASCT.

89. Minutes of the executive commission of Pro Locarno, February 8, 1966, box 4, 2.2.80, ASCT.

90. Letter from the festival to Pro Locarno, December 3, 1965, and minutes of the executive commission of Pro Locarno, January 26, 1966, box 40, 2.2.80, ASCT.

91. Minutes of the executive commission of the festival, March 17, 1967, C9, 3.1.15, ASCT.

92. Minutes of the executive commission of the festival, October 20, 1967, C9, 3.1.15, ASCT.

93. It should, however, be noted that in 1968, the festival became more strongly identified with the city of Locarno when the Golden Leopard (reminding of the symbol of the city, a lion) replaced the Golden Sail as the trophy for the winner of the competition. Diana Rizzi and Illaria Filardi, *Il Pardo: emblema del Festival del film di Locarno* (Locarno: Fondazione Remo Rossi, 2018).

94. Minutes of the meeting of the Federal Cinema Commission, November 18, 1970, box 12, CSL011, Cin; Volonterio, *Spazio autonomo*, 190; letter from Bianconi to the FIAPF, October 28, 1967, V14, 3.1.15, ASCT.

95. Bl, "Wird Locarno zur zweiten 'Berlinale'?", *Schweizer Film Suisse*, no. 10 (October 1970): 3–4. Freddy Buache was a known leftist who had already been targeted by anticommunist campaigns. Freddy Buache, *Derrière l'écran: entretiens avec Christophe Gallaz et Jean-François Amiguet* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 2009).

96. Minutes of the meeting of the Federal Cinema Commission, November 18, 1970, box 12, CSL011, Cin.

However, after four editions, they both decided that they could no longer cooperate with the rest of the executive committee and they left, discouraged by "the indifference, incomprehension, and hostility of public opinion."¹⁰³ In a private letter, Buache later explained his disappointment to see Locarno, which was becoming "one of the most original [film festivals] in world [for] young international cinema, disgusted by the commercial fairs of Cannes or Berlin and the Venice mess [...] returning to the open air, that is to say to tourism."¹⁰⁴ As it turned out, without proper political support, the cultural ambitions of the cinephiles were kept in check by the economic stakeholders of the event.

Immediately after the resignation of both directors, an *ad interim* management team composed of Swiss intellectuals and journalists organized the return of the festival to the outdoors. If at first the Piazza Grande was disqualified as a new venue because it caused too many technical problems (echo, public lights, neighbors, shops, traffic), it was eventually considered the most "touristically valid" by Pro Locarno.¹⁰⁵ Considering that tourism in Ticino was in decline, the dates of the festival were reset for the high season (early August, see table 2), and a twenty-by-ten-meter screen—once again the biggest in Europe at the time—was constructed in the center of the city in 1971. This return to the outdoors for an audience of two thousand spectators (a number that increased each year) was primarily supported by Pro Locarno, which "feared that Chur, Lausanne, Lucerne or Zurich would jump at the chance to take their place" after the uncertainty created by the departure of Buache and Bianconi.¹⁰⁶ Of the 210,000 CHF invested to build a giant screen and a projection room on the Piazza, 120,000 were loaned to the festival by the tourist organization (respectively ~ 550,000 and 320,000 Euros today).¹⁰⁷

Once again, the driving force behind Locarno's survival was the tourism industry. For that matter, the financial support of Pro Locarno during most of the 1970s remained high, since it represented approximately 50 percent of all subventions received by the festival. In 1972, bragging about having spent 750,000 CHF for the festival since its creation, the tourist office demanded that the executive commission of the event include at least four of its members (as before the Bianconi-Buache editions).¹⁰⁸ As the legal owner of all the material necessary for the outdoor cinema,¹⁰⁹ Pro Locarno also complained about the lack of media emphasis on their contribution ("[this is] an event of the tourist office," they said).¹¹⁰ Paradoxically, while Pro Locarno deemed the festival to be insufficiently commercial despite supervising its finances, many cinephiles felt that "the identity of Locarno had been sacrificed and betrayed,"¹¹¹ with one writing ironically that "local pharmacists and veterinarians w[ould] once again be able to dress in tuxedos and evening gowns to attend tasteful shows."¹¹²

However, the tourism industry's weight on the festival's organizing committee was not as heavy as in the 1940s and the 1950s. The great disruption of the late 1960s indeed opened the way for more independent programming in the 1970s.¹¹³ Most notably, alternative selections conceived as platforms for new cinema appeared in 1969 in Cannes and in 1971 in Berlin under the names *Quinzaine des réalisateurs* and *Forum des Jungen Films*.¹¹⁴ Similarly, a section called *Tribune libre* dedicated to more experimental movies was created in Locarno, where change was meant to be personified by the new director Moritz de Hadeln, a young documentary maker who was the first non-Swiss citizen to hold this position.

97. Letter from FIAPF to Bianconi, November 13, 1967, V14, 3.1.15, ASCT.

98. Most notably, the closing ceremony of Locarno was disturbed by young activists who occupied the Kural cinema to protest the bourgeois character of the event (a similar critique was directed at Venice that year).

99. The international jury presided by Czech director Jiří Menzel—who first considered boycotting the Soviet, Hungarian, and East German movies to protest the crushing of the Prague Spring by the Warsaw Pact troops—decided to step down in favor of the youth jury because of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.

100. Minutes of the executive commission of the festival, October 27, 1968, C9, 3.1.15, ASCT.

101. Reports by the festival on the 1968–69 editions, K1, 3.1.15, ASCT.

102. Letter from Buache to Bianconi, March 14, 1969, CSL1-35/4, Cin.

103. Letter from Buache and Bianconi to the festival, October 4, 1970, C29, 3.1.15, ASCT.

104. Letter from Buache to Bixio Candolfi, August 24, 1971, S3, 3.1.15, ASCT.

105. Minutes of the direction council of Pro Locarno, May 8, 1971, box 44, 2.2.80, ASCT.

106. René Dasen, "Locarno 1971: un festival de transition," *Schweizer Film Suisse*, no. 9 (September 1971): 17.

107. Letter from the director of Pro Locarno to the executive committee, July 20, 1971, box 47, 2.2.80, ASCT.

108. The director of Pro Locarno also became administrative secretary of the festival.

109. Minutes of the executive commission of Pro Locarno, June 22, 1971, box 44, 2.2.80, ASCT.

110. Memo by Pro Locarno, 1972, box

In 1972, de Hadeln was designated manager of the Swiss Society of International Film Festivals, a newly created administrative entity supported by the federal administration, regrouping Locarno and the Nyon documentary film festival (which Moritz and Erika de Hadeln had created a few years earlier).¹¹⁵ Often described as a man of consensus, Locarno's new director successfully reconciled both tourists and cinephiles during his six years in the office. Considering that his predecessors had wrongfully ignored the economic stakeholders of the film industry by transforming Locarno into a giant film club, he clearly stated that for him, a film festival was primarily aimed at the professionals of the branch.¹¹⁶ With this in mind, he created a Film Market, something that had only been briefly explored in Locarno under the aegis of the FIAPF in 1964.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, de Hadeln, who wished to have Locarno specialize in young filmmakers and then-called Third World cinema like his predecessors, did not exactly enjoy serene relations with the FIAPF. Because the federation, which he described as an outdated "organization which d[id] nothing but defend the interests of established cinema,"¹¹⁸ wanted to rank the festival in the D category, he invented a rather vague specialization ("new cinematographic perspectives") for Locarno to stay in the A category. But despite some minor polemics—some believed that the new direction, from French-speaking Switzerland, aimed to move the event to Nyon¹¹⁹—the relationships between economic and cultural stakeholders became more harmonious. Taking advantage of the difficulties encountered by its main competitor (Venice),¹²⁰ and in close collaboration with some American distributors and film critics, de Hadeln eventually improved relations with the FIAPF, a process he deemed "difficult but beneficial [due to the] economic interests at stake."¹²¹

Conclusion: To the 1980s and Beyond

Despite its "cinephile" reputation, the Locarno Film Festival was never free of economic pressures. In the 1940s, as a grassroots event without any political support, it was originally dominated by the commercial interests of its two main stakeholders: the tourism and film industries. After four initial years which seemed to satisfy everyone except cinephiles, the festival emerged as an entity of its own and embarked on a quest for autonomy and independence. But as soon as it demonstrated its cultural aspirations, the LFF entered an area of turbulence. In a weak position because of a lack of support at the federal level, it had to cancel two editions during the 1950s. These difficulties eventually triggered a reaction from the state, allowing the event to find a common ground with the FIAPF with the help of Oscar Düby. Moreover, despite some resistance, its director, Vinicio Beretta, succeeded in specializing Locarno in "new cinema" during the 1960s, to the great pleasure of cinephiles. Nevertheless, the radical attempt to transform the festival into an alternative celebration of world cinema in the late 1960s faced resistance from the tourism and film industries. Without the backing of public authorities, this situation was fatal to the ambitions of its directors. Finally, despite uneven relationships with tourism promoters and film professionals, Moritz de Hadeln succeeded in internationalizing and stabilizing the LFF during the 1970s. Thanks to a new balance between the different stakeholders in the global film festival landscape, and with a strong support from the Confederation, Locarno made a fresh start under better auspices to open a new chapter in its history.

As this article has argued, despite the persistence of a romantic conception of cinema (art for

111. Schlappner et al., *40 ans*, 69.
112. Louis Seguin, "La fin de Locarno," *Positif*, no. 124 (1971): 51.
113. Caroline Moine, "De Cannes à Karlovy Vary, de Berlin-Ouest à Venise: les festivals internationaux de cinéma dans les tourmentes de 1968," in *Images et sons de mai 68 (1968–2008)*, ed. Christian Delporte (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2011), 235–49.
114. Olivier Thévenin, *Sociologie d'une institution cinématographique: la S.R.F. et la Quinzaine des réalisateurs*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009); Peter Cowie, *Die Berlinale, das Festival* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2010).
115. Moritz de Hadeln, *C'est du cinéma!* (Nyon: Festival international du film documentaire, 1988).
116. However, cinema operators and distributors still viewed Locarno as a niche festival and kept their distance. Christian Jungen, *Moritz de Hadeln: Mister Filmfestival* (Zürich: Rüffer & Rub, 2018), 162; telegram from de Hadeln to the executive commission of the festival, July 23, 1975, B244, CSL 8, Cin.
117. One year after Venice launched a similar initiative, Cannes' *Marché du Film* was established in 1951, but it was only made official in 1959. In comparison, before Berlin launched the European Film Market in 1978, its *Film Messe* was created in 1973.
118. Report about the 1972 edition, n.d., B78, CSL 8, Cin.
119. Christian Zeender, "Cinéma: le Festival de Locarno en butte aux critiques. On le juge trop commercial ou trop intellectuel ...," *Journal de Genève*, August 16, 1975, 9.
120. Letter from de Hadeln to the executive committee of the festival, July 2, 1976, B74, CSL 8, Cin.
121. Report of the Swiss Society of International Film Festivals, 1977, B73, CSL 8, Cin.

art's sake), Locarno's history eloquently illustrates that "creating the conditions for a cinephiliac experience is not a film festival's only consideration. These are, after all, film festivals."¹²² Just as the "extra-cinematic or para-cinematic events at film festivals are key to their success,"¹²³ the "non-cinephiliac" aspects of these multidimensional events are crucial to their identity building. Every film festival had to negotiate to become emancipated from economic powers and follow its cultural agenda¹²⁴ while taking into account the changing interests of its stakeholders.¹²⁵ Yet, if Locarno's claim for autonomy echoed similar demands from other film festivals during the 1950s and the 1960s, the peculiarity of the Swiss case certainly was that it was not a fight against the state, but on the contrary a quest for more support from the government. For example, while the transmission of official invitations via diplomatic channels (a requirement from the FIAPF to give national producers' associations a decisive role in the selection of movies) was considered by major film festivals as a constraint and a subjection to commercial logics, it was seen by Locarno as a mean of gaining legitimacy.

Retrospectively, Locarno's first thirty years appear as a period of increasing divergence between the tourism and film industries on one side, and the so-called cinephiles (film critics, film clubs, Cinémathèque) on the other, since the former's ascendancy within the festival was increasingly denounced as illegitimate by the latter. It was only after the "clash" of the late 1960s that the slate was wiped clean and a more fruitful collaboration started. Post-1977 editions also met several difficulties, but they were no longer hampered by the conflicting agendas of various stakeholders, as during the first decades of the festival. Yet, if these tensions between the agendas of the LFF's stakeholders seemed settled under de Hadeln's direction (1972–77), subsequent developments revealed that key issues continued to animate festival stakeholders. Be that as it may, in 1982, film magazines such as the *Cahiers du cinéma* still considered Locarno to be seeking a compromise "between a sincere cinephiliac desire on the part of its organizers, and bluntly economic calculations (tourism) conducted by the regional authorities."¹²⁶

Because of the conflicts between its main stakeholders, the LFF gained momentum only in the 1980s. It expanded by using new buildings such as the Morettina, a high school complex situated ten minutes from the city center, and the Palexpo/FEVI auditorium, slightly closer to the Piazza Grande—to significantly increase the number of spectators.¹²⁷ The LFF also received increasing financial support and sponsorship from private entities, such as the Union Bank of Switzerland (whose logo was booed by the audience at first). The growth was such that in 1986, president Raimondo Rezzonico estimated that the festival contributed four to five million Swiss francs (six to eight million Euros today) to the local economy.¹²⁸ All of these transformations took place under the leadership of David Streiff (former director of the *Centre suisse du cinema* and head of the *Tribune libre* section of the festival since 1973), who described having had to work hard to reconcile the interests of the tourism industry with his cultural ambitions.¹²⁹

Further research should thus analyze how these changes unfolded in the decisive decade of the 1980s, shaped by new challenges such as the proliferation of festivals, the globalization of the film industry, and the gentrification of the LFF. What were the strategies of the festival to maintain its "Swiss" identity while affirming itself as an international hub? Why did it start to describe itself as "the smallest of the great and the greatest of the small film festivals" (a formula originally used by Italian film critic Tullio Kezich)? How were its massive public relations and marketing

122. Liz Czach, "Cinephilia, Stars, and Film Festivals," *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 2 (2010): 144..

123. Ibid, 145.

124. Stefano Pisu, *Il XX secolo sul red carpet. Politica, economia e cultura nei festival internazionali del cinema (1932–1976)* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2017).

125. See, for example, Charles-Clemens Rüling, "Festivals as Field-Configuring Events: The Annecy International Animated Film Festival and Market," in *The Festival Circuit*, 49–66.

126. Serge Le Péron, "Locarno 1982. Auteurs où êtes-vous ?," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 341 (1982): iii.

127. Information about attendance of the festival is extremely incomplete. While the 1946 edition seems to have attracted about 10,000 spectators, the number for the 1982 edition was only 20,000. However, with the construction of the Palexpo/FEVI auditorium in the late 1980s (3,200 seats), attendance rapidly grew to 60,000 in 1985, 80,000 in 1987, 115,000 in 1989, and 145,000 in 1995. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival boasted 157,700 spectators.

128. Schlappner et al., *40 ans*, 388.

129. David Streiff, "The Reasons and Aims behind Public Funding," in *Forever Young: Festival del Film Locarno 1997–2012*, ed. Lorenzo Buccella (Locarno: Festival del film Locarno, 2014), 429–31.

130. Colin Michael Hall, "The Definition and Analysis of Hallmark Tourist Events," *GeoJournal* 19, no. 3 (1989): 263–68; Donald Getz et al., "Hallmark Events: Definition, Goals and Planning Process," *International Journal of Event Management Research* 7, no. 1-2 (2012): 47–67.

131. Email exchanges with David Streiff, April 14, 2021 (translated by the author).

campaigns—using the leopard as an icon (inspired by the heraldic symbol of Locarno and the name of the trophies since 1968)—designed and implemented? Should this effort to brand the hallmark event with its host city be understood as a remedy to the region's continual fear of another Swiss town "stealing" the festival in times of crisis?¹³⁰ All of these interrogations would help to elucidate how the festival professionalized, and how it further developed its cinephilic identity while maintaining a "summer feeling and vacation mood that makes Locarno so attractive."¹³¹

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