Ibermedia Readies Funds

Fostering Latin co-productions is a priority

The application guidelines for Ibermedia – the Latin countries answer to the Media Programme – will be made public in August, it was announced at the recent Midia television market, held in Spain.

In its first year, Ibermedia is to provide a minimum of $3 million in loans to be "progressively recovered," with the first monies to be paid out in late 1998. The funds will come from the coffers of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Spain, Mexico, Portugal, and Venezuela. Ibermedia has initially been given a four year mandate.

The first multi-nation financial support mechanism to benefit the Portuguese and Spanish language television industries was created at the fifth annual Ibero-American Summit, held in Venezuela last November. At the summit heads of state from the participating nations agreed to use the framework of the Conference of Ibero-American Cinematographic Authorities (CACI) to set up a new scheme inspired by the European Union's Media Programme and Eurimages, the Council of Europe scheme funding cinema fiction and cinema documentaries.

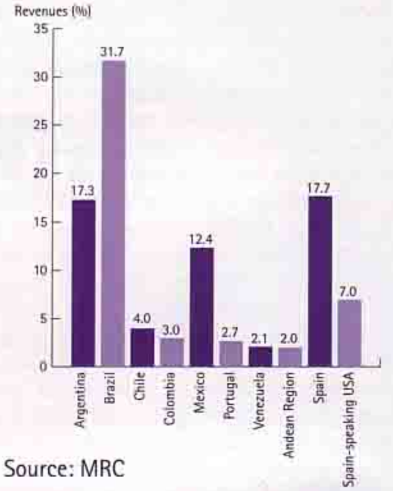
The CACI, created in 1989 to promote the audiovisual industry in the region, is made up of 13 member nations and some observers. Ibermedia is probably one of its most ambitious initiatives.

Companies from both member and observer nations of CACI will be eligible for Ibermedia assistance, while Portugual and Spain will have their pick of support schemes: both countries are eligible for Media, Ibermedia, and Eurimages funding. Fund administration will be carried out by the AECI (Spanish International Co-operation Agency), an department of the foreign affairs ministry.

AECI has said that applications from producers and distributors of television, cinema, and multi-media will be accepted, although at present, it is not known how much funding will go to each sector.

Much in the same way as the EC's Media II, there will be official funding areas and specific support targets within each. Of the four Ibermedia areas, co-production will be by far the largest, set to receive 60% of the money, compared with 30% for distribution, 5% for development, and 5% for training. Also, like the EC's Media programme, a principal intent in the scheme is to foster the creation of professional networks where knowledge and contacts are shared. Equally important is to help the industry attain state-of-the-art technical proficiency on a par with that of U.S. and European competitors.

Audio-visual Revenues In Ibermedia Region



Source: MRC

In many ways though, the two programmes are significantly different. One key difference is the existence of a dedicated co-production funding area within Ibermedia. This indicates that Ibermedia's organisers are gambling that co-productions – to date far less common and successful in the Ibero-American regions than elsewhere – should be boosted. Another, is scale. While Media II is worth $88.3 million per year, Ibermedia will grant only $3.8 million, or 4.3% of the Media budget. Surprisingly little considering that the combined GDP of Ibermedia contributing countries is no less than about 45% of the EU's total GDP.

The disparity can perhaps be explained by the fact that the programme is only in its first year and that the audiovisual industry in the Ibero-American region is small to start with. But whether the initial commitment will suffice to make a noticeable difference in the success of the industry and thereby prove the programme's worth remains to be seen.

by Jean-Fabrice Vernet – LONDON