



The contemporary aragonese cinematographic comedy. Creative keys of its filmmakers and producers

La comedia cinematográfica aragonesa contemporánea.
Claves creativas de sus cineastas y productores/as

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Comedy, one of the film genres with the largest audience, serves as a means to analyze social problems and reflect the culture and identity of the different territories. **Methodology:** This investigation

carries out eleven in-depth interviews with the directors and producers of seven comedies financed with public aid from the Aragonese Radio and Television Corporation, from 2013 to 2022. A semi-structured questionnaire is applied that addresses the creative process, the narrative keys and the relationship between culture and identity and financing. **Results:** Aragonese comedy professionals show a trend marked by creative diversity, although with roots in classical comedy and personal experiences that, in the background, are intertwined with social criticism aimed at attracting the general public. For this, various themes are addressed with stereotyped, but novel characters, in which irony prevails, thanks to comic actors as a sample of characteristic humour, although not a priority. In addition, they highlight the preference for the locations in Aragon to contribute to an identity comedy that, together with the promotion and regional financing, promotes the dissemination of the own narrative, encourages local talent and generates a positive economic impact. **Conclusions:** Finally, the filmmakers express the need to develop more ambitious projects, backed by larger financial aid and tax incentives that make Aragon a true film destination.

Keywords: Comedy; Aragón; Contemporary Spanish cinema; Film director; Producer; Financing.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La comedia, uno de los géneros cinematográficos con mayor audiencia, sirve como medio para analizar las problemáticas sociales y reflejar la cultura e identidad de los diferentes territorios. **Metodología:** Esta investigación realiza once entrevistas en profundidad a los directores/as y productores/as de siete comedias financiadas con ayudas públicas de la Corporación Aragonesa de Radio y Televisión aragonesa, desde 2013 a 2022. Se aplica un cuestionario semiestructurado que aborda el proceso creativo, las claves narrativas, la relación con la cultura e identidad y la financiación. **Resultados:** Los profesionales de la comedia aragonesa muestran una tendencia marcada por la diversidad creativa, aunque con raíces en la comedia clásica y en vivencias personales que, en un segundo plano, se entrelazan con una crítica social dirigida a atraer al público generalista. **Discusión:** Para ello, se abordan diversas temáticas con personajes estereotipados, pero novedosos, en los que prevalece la ironía, gracias a actores cómicos, como muestra de un humor característico, aunque no prioritario. Además, destacan la preferencia por las localizaciones en Aragón para contribuir a una comedia identitaria que, junto con la promoción y financiación regional, promueve la difusión de la narrativa propia, fomenta el talento local y genera un impacto económico positivo. **Conclusiones:** Por último, los cineastas expresan la necesidad de desarrollar proyectos más ambiciosos, respaldados por ayudas financieras más cuantiosas e incentivos fiscales que conviertan a Aragón en un verdadero destino cinematográfico.

Palabras clave: Comedia; Aragón; Cine contemporáneo español; Director, directora de cine; Productor, productora; Financiación.

1. Introduction

Comedy is characterized by its intentionality and its ability to generate satisfaction in the audience (Llanos, 2007) through desire (Mauron, 1964), presenting a "happy ending, the fictitious nature of the plot, and the presence of humble characters" (Traveso, 2012, p. 108). This genre, dominant in commercial Spanish cinema (Bernárdez-Rodal and Padilla-Castillo, 2018), seeks to amuse and make the viewer laugh in all territorial areas, which gives it a privileged place in the history of cinema (Campos, 1997). Comedies are the preferred choice of the public, especially among older people (Ministry of Culture, 2022), making them a reference in Spanish cinema. Titles like "*Ocho apellidos vascos*" (Emilio Martínez-Lázaro, 2014), the highest-grossing national film, or "*Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley*" (Santiago Segura, 1998), have achieved great success across different generations (AMC, 2021), as well as classics like "*Bienvenido Mr. Marshall*" (Luis García Berlanga, 1953) and "*Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*" (Pedro Almodóvar, 1988).

This research analyzes the creation of comedic films through in-depth interviews with directors and producers whose decisions result in the humorous tone and stylistic dimension (Chambat-Houillon and Le Corff, 2017). For this purpose, a case study is conducted on productions benefiting from the regional television of Aragon from 2013 to 2022, where the intention to captivate the audience through humor is explored, combined with identity elements such as locations and a social backdrop created through classic characters and resources

like irony, a distinctive feature of "somarda" humor. Although there is no normative definition of "somarda" in the Dictionary of the Spanish Language, it can be described as "subtle humor that creates unease in the viewer" (Cano, 2023). Fatás (2018) places it as possibly originating from Italian, with "somardino" referring to a comic character in Polichinella plays, or "somaro," alluding to a pack mule in stories. He also attributes it a "mischievous and sly spirit," with a hidden intent to mock and "convey something, but as if unintentional."

2. Theoretical framework: cinematic art and comedy

The research on the history of cinema has been a prolific task (Sadoul, 1972; Caparrós, 2009; Benet, 2012; Gubern, 2016), with documentary value that attests to each era (Zubiaur-Carreño, 2005) and acts as a "sophisticated means of dissemination" (Paz-Rebollo, 1995, p. 45). The so-called seventh art is a source of "enormous" aesthetic complexity and "ambitious" intellectual richness, as stated by Gubern in the preface of Sánchez-Noriega (2002), who highlights how film production involves a complex creative process that endures in the viewer's memory by addressing their interests: "There are times when the audience needs to laugh, while at others, it seeks escape through adventure or the need to reflect on immediate reality" (p. 185).

Cinematic art encompasses various genres, including comedy, addressed internationally in Hollywood productions (Karnick and Jenkins, 1995), Ibero-America (Smith, 2015), Anglo-Saxon cinema (Hunter and Porter, 2012), French and Italian cinema. Rème Lanzoni (2014) argues that comedies have acted as social barometers in these contexts, reflecting the struggles of each era. This genre has a long history and is considered fundamental in cinema, with its formula (Mast, 1979; Campos, 1997), artists (Arconada, 2007), and essential titles having been examined, showcasing its liberating character (Llopis, 1998).

Studies by Pérez-Morán and Huerta-Florianó (2017; 2018) reflect on how comedy films are valuable documents for audiovisual and social analysis because they adapt "to the characteristics of the environment" (Huerta-Florianó, 2005, p. 139). Thus, the evolution of comedy from the silent era to the postmodern era (Revert, 2015), its development during the dictatorship (Aguilar, 2017; Marsh, 2006), and its progression into the 21st century have been explored. Del Amo (2009) argues that comedy has remained true to itself in the 21st century, thanks to its strength and popular success rooted in stereotypes, which serve as pre-existing cultural patterns to filter reality (Amossy and Pierrot, 2020) and understand the world. Pérez-Morán (2022) confronts comedy with political events up to 2020. At the regional level, there is an academic gap. The work that encompasses it is coordinated by Caparrós, "Cine español, una historia por autonomías" (1996), which mentions regions like Aragon that have some studies on their image in cinema (Sanz-Ferreruela, 2013), the production of short films (Lasierra and Bonaut, 2020), or the extension of cinematic development as heritage (Modrego, 2005)

Furthermore, the humor reflected in comedy contributes to expressing the idiosyncrasies of each place (Romero et al., 2007). In this sense, Checa (1992) argues that popular humor shapes culture and records "aspirations, experiences, and feelings" (p. 79) because there are universal references reflected in every community. For example, Spanish humor originates in Castilla la Mancha, Aragon, and La Rioja, thanks to figures like Cervantes, Quevedo, Larra, Goya, and Gracián (Jardiel-Poncela, 2002). According to Martínez-García (2009), this is reflected in the Catalan sitcom with its "repetitive use of insults and mockery" (p. 236); Andalusian humor is characterized by lively and fast-paced dialogues filled with idioms (Checa, 1992), while the characteristics of Madrid's comedy (Sanz-Ferreruela, 2019) are reflected in paradigmatic titles like "*Tigres de papel*" (1977), "*Ópera prima*" (1980), and Pedro Almodóvar's debut in 1980 with "*Pepi, Luci y Bom y otras chicas del montón*." Therefore, it is necessary to consider regional elements to identify the components of comedy. In the Basque Country, the most recent and successful phenomenon, "*Ocho apellidos vascos*," generates an identity-based comedy through exaggerated stereotypes (Belamendia, 2016) and topics that were not subject to public ridicule in discourse (Colbert, 2016), demonstrating how comedy works on identification and acts as catharsis¹, even in autonomous regions (Piñón, 2014).

¹. Reflection by Marina Ruiz and Javier Jurado in the paper Stereotypes and media imaginaries of Basque identity. 2011-2020 GRISOM-AETE Seminar University of Paris Nanterre 10/03/2023.

2.1. Aragonese Humor and Its "*Comedia Somarda*"

Sense of humor and comedic forms can vary according to social codes and the context in which they develop (Huerta-Floriano, 2005). No all-encompassing theory of comedy has been successful due to the deep-rooted comic tradition in cultures (Horton, 1991). In the case of Aragonese humor, it is characterized by being rough and reflecting a peculiar conception of the region, with attributes like stubbornness and obstinacy, and terms like "baturro" and "noble." This native stamp translates into a kind of humor known as "socarrón" (Santamaría, 2008) or "somarda," a sly wit that humorist José Luis Cano (2016) demystifies with eloquence, using precise words and timing silence appropriately, leaving the interlocutor perplexed, akin to an ironic litotes (pp. 24-28) exemplified in a conversation:

— I don't get it. — It's because it's very difficult to catch a "somarda." It's usually the other way around: The "somarda" is the one who disorients the interlocutor. Or who puts them in their place, which amounts to the same thing. — Is the "somarda" a comedian? — Not exactly. — A prankster? — Not that either. — A joker? — Even less. — Well, I don't get it. — Do you know the one from the commercial that says, "I'm not a fool"? — Yes. — Well, that's the exact opposite of a "somarda." — The anti-"somarda" (p. 46).

Additionally, other Aragonese figures, such as Pilar Bayona, also contributed to the "*españolada*" genre by portraying female characters in films like *Dos pistolas gemelas* (Rafael Romero, 1965) and *El taxi de los conflictos* (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia and Mariano Ozores, 1969). It was a favorable time for comedic duos, like the one formed by Andrés Pajares and Fernando Esteso. The latter, also from Aragón, and in collaboration with director Mariano Ozores, created a successful cycle (Pérez-Morán and Huerta-Floriano, 2017), with movies such as *Los bingueros* (1979) and *Padre no hay más que dos* (1982), addressing social issues like sexual freedom (Pérez-Morán and Huerta-Floriano, 2018), which had not yet been normalized either socially or legislatively.

Another architect of Aragonese comedy was José María Forqué, who, since the post-war period, directed films like *Atraco a las tres* (1962) and *La becerrada* (1962), in which he employed the somarda humor characterized by its subtlety and the disquiet it causes in the viewer (Cano, 2023). Over time, he evolved towards costume parodies and urban comedies of the transition period (Huerta-Floriano and Pérez-Morán, 2015). During this period, we also find the cinematic career of Aragonese filmmaker Carlos Saura, with movies like *Peppermint frappé* (1967) and *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1990), a comical comedy about the Spanish Civil War, based on the work of Valencian playwright Sanchís Sinisterra. To this narrative, we can add two significant figures, the Aragonese director José Luis Borau, who acted in the comedy *Todos a la cárcel* (1993) directed by Luis García Berlanga, who, in turn, directed *La vaquilla* (1985), shot in Sos del Rey Católico (Aragon). These representative names in Spanish and Aragonese comedy were part of a generational shift aimed at reaching a more cultivated audience through television, following the path of "Almodóvar & Co" (Borau, 2002, pp. 27-28).

Today, the Aragonese film industry has experienced a new period of development with the presence of directors like Nacho García Velilla, the creator of *Que se mueran los feos* (2010), *Perdiendo el Norte* (2015), and *Villaviciosa de al lado* (2016), as well as Miguel Ángel Lamata with *Isi & Disi, Alto voltaje* (2006), *Tensión sexual no resuelta* (2010), along with *Bendita calamidad* (2016), a comedy by Gaizka Urresti featuring Aragonese actors like Nacho Rubio, Jorge Asín, and Marisol Aznar who have made their mark in comedy, participating in various productions. In addition to Luisa Gabasa, featured in *Para entrar a vivir* (Pablo Aragüés, 2021), and *Miau* (Ignacio Estaregui, 2018), as well as José Luis Gil, Laura Gómez-Lacueva, and Alexandra Jiménez.

In this way, Aragonese comedy has enriched and diversified itself, becoming an important part of the history of cinema in Spain. In a context where the film industry requires infrastructure, a market, and state aid, as pointed out by Lagny (1997), "a film is so deeply rooted in the environment that produces it that it is literally imbued with easily recognizable currents" (p. 98).

2.2. Cinematography and Public Policies: The Relevance of Autonomous Entities

In Spain, competencies related to cinematography are shared between the central government and the autonomous communities through a "wide range of public aids" (De-la-Sierra, 2010, p. 64) based on the 2007 Law, last modified in 2015, and interconnected with international and European calls. These cultural policies (Gavilán et al., 2014) promote film production as a rewarding business and an industrial driver, while also reflecting artistic and cultural values of the place of production (Gómez, 2005). According to Casado (2005), the autonomous communities, with a strong cultural identity, consider territoriality as a key criterion in granting aid, allowing the creation of their own audiovisual content.

In this regard, television, especially public television channels, play an important role in promoting regional identity (Azpillaga, 2000) through specific strategies. In the case of Aragon, since the 2014 Program Contract, the Evaluation Committee of CARTV assesses aspects related to the region to support and redirect funds to local cinema: filming, equipment, or cultural values for citizens, among others. This way, they fulfill their obligation to allocate 5% of their annual profits, of which a minimum of 60% is for feature films, to boost territorial cinema (Figure 1).

The analysis of film subsidies reveals different perspectives. While Heredero-Díaz and Reyes-Sánchez (2017) point to a low correlation between the annual amount of state calls for proposals and the number of Spanish films produced, on the contrary, it is argued that the implemented policies have contributed to the success of Spanish cinema (Pérez-Ruffí and Castro-Higueras, 2020) and that the support of regional institutions is essential to boost regional or peripheral cinema (Gómez-Pérez et al., 2010). Furthermore, these authors argue that new filmmakers trained in their own autonomous communities have contributed to the "flourishing and consolidation of an audiovisual industry in which they tell stories from their own territory" (p. 186).

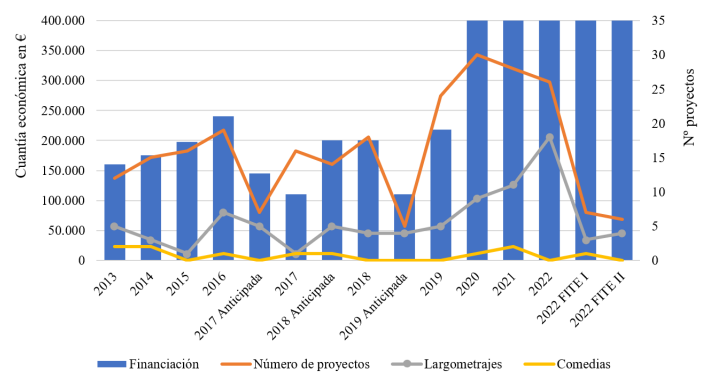
As a result, regional cinema is characterized by its uniqueness, which requires hard work and time to develop, and from which it needs to be supported by public subsidies from those "autonomous communities determined to promote it because they see it as a tool to achieve certain objectives" (Rodríguez, 2022, p. 103). The fight against social inequalities and the defense of territorial particularities are values of public service promoted by regional television stations that, through their support for cinema, encourage the creation of a local industry in line with "the cultural aspects and the idiosyncrasy of each territory" (Casado, 2012, pp. 203-204).

In this regard, Álvarez-Monzoncillo and López-Villanueva (2006) consider it "of vital importance" to emphasize the need to increase "promotional formulas and protection measures" (p. 5) since cinema is an essential sector for the defense of cultural diversity. These particularities of cinema, like other industries, require the involvement of all possible sectors, as well as a safe and stable environment for their development (Díaz-González, 2016) that allows for the promotion of talent and a broad production circle.

3. Objectives

The main objective is to understand the key aspects of the creation of Aragonese comedy films funded by the regional audiovisual entity. In addition, as specific objectives, the first one aims to authenticate the distinctive

Figure 1: Amounts, projects, and feature films benefiting from CARTV grants (2013-2022).



Fuente: Self-prepared from press releases, reports, and official CARTV announcements.

Aragonese characteristics present in these films, and secondarily, to determine the impact of regional television funding bias in the first decade of its existence. This is an advance in audiovisual heritage through which the effects of comedy from a fertile and creative region can be visualized, with the intention of providing useful results for academia, professionals, and citizens as a social projection of film studies.

4. Methodology

A qualitative methodology is employed (Ruiz-Olabuénaga, 2012), combining document analysis and in-depth interviews (De Miguel, 2005) with directors (Gurpegui, 2004; Obradors, 2005), producers, or individuals responsible for film production (Díaz-González, 2016). The involvement of these professionals (Deltell et al., 2016) allows for the participation of key figures responsible for the ideation, promotion, and realization of the cinematic creative process (Obradors, 2003; Sánchez-Noriega, 2002). As Casetti and Di Chio (1990) argue, a film can be analyzed beyond its imagery, considering its context and the personalities of decisive profiles, following Flick's (2015) proposal. These individuals can provide rich and diverse information (Kvale, 2011).

The Aragonese Radio and Television Corporation has carried out fourteen public calls for film grants between 2013 and 2022, including ten general calls and three early calls to apply for selective grants, as well as a dual procedure from the Teruel Investment Fund for projects with an impact on the audiovisual sector. Out of this funding, 85 occasions have benefited feature-length films- as multiple grants can be obtained. Seven of these films have been comedies, according to the objective criteria (Pérez-Morán, 2022) of the Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts (ICAA). The technical and creative details of these productions are broken down below (Table 1).

Table 1. Data from comedies funded by CARTV and a list of interviewees.

Title	Call for proposals	Amount CARTV	Revenue (euros)	Espectators	Directors and Producers
1. Nuestros amantes	2013	23.700 €	422.622	72.384	Miguel Ángel Lamata Raúl García Medrano
2. Bendita calamidad	2013	30.000 €	202.049	40.541	Gaizka Urresti Silvia Gómez
	2014	30.000 €			
3. Justi&CIA	2013	Excluida	60.741	10.470	Ignacio Estaregui Gloria Sendino
	2014	35.000 €			
4. Villaviciosa de al lado	2014	40.000 €	10.176.254	1.591.692	Nacho García Velilla Mikel Lejarza
5. Miau	2017	20.000 €	42.065	8.018	Ignacio Estaregui Gloria Sendino
	2018	30.000 €			
6. García y García	2020	35.000 €	985.208	174.380	Ana Murugarren Joaquín Trincado
	2021	25.000 €			
	2022 FITE I	27.500 €			
7. Para entrar a vivir	2021	20.000 €	1.032	250	Pablo Aragüés Marta Cabrera*

Source: https://icaa.mcu.es/Datos_tecnicos_Peliculas.aspx
<https://www.filmaffinity.com>

<http://www.aragontelevision.es/nosotros/financiacion-anticipada/>

Consulted on 08/22/2023 *Note: Declines to participate in the research.

On them, a professional evaluation was carried out by eleven experts (Table 1) in the field of Aragonese comedy, which allowed us to answer the following research questions, from which hypotheses were formulated:

Q1. Does comedy have particularities in its creative process?

H1. Comedy films can differentiate themselves based on each filmmaker's creative process. The singularities in the creative process of comedy, such as the choice of tone, style, and narrative approach, contribute significantly to its distinctive cinematic identity.

Q2. Can comedy be identified with a geopolitical territory?

H2. Each territory is associated with a type of comedy. The ability of comedy to identify with a geopolitical territory is linked to the representation of cultural values, stereotypes, and specific characteristics of the region, influencing the audience's perception and reception of that territory.

Q3. What are the keys to Aragonese comedy?

H3. Aragonese comedy is characterized by irony, exaggeration, and mockery, distinctive elements of "somarda" humor, which are reflected in comic productions of Aragonese origin.

Q4. How important is public funding in the production of comedy?

H4. Although comedy is the most popular genre, it requires economic and promotional support that takes into account its particular characteristics. The importance of public funding in the production of comedy is reflected in the artistic quality that must also achieve media visibility, as a determining factor for its success in the film industry.

Figure 2: Code matrix used for interview preparation.

1. Creative process	2. Comedy composition
Ideation process External and internal stimuli Creative phases Purpose in the audience Specificities of the audience based on the geopolitical territory.	Narration: plot and characters Current themes Humorous keys Resources of Aragonese comedy
3. Culture and identity relationships	4. Fundin Possibilities
Stereotypes Location Cultural origin of the comedy Comedy as an identity resource Specificities of Aragonese culture and humor.	The importance of regional funds Regional, national, or international calls for proposals. TV promotion (Festivals, awards)

Source: Author's own work.

The study starts from the premise that each territory is assumed to have a particular sense of humor, which is reflected in Aragonese comedy through characters, plots, and locations that also showcase places linked to the organizations providing the funding. To answer these questions, interviews were conducted, mostly in person, between April and June 2023. A semi-structured questionnaire consisting of twenty questions based on four main sections (Figure 2) was applied, generated from questions about the creative process by Obradors (2007), criteria for success in television humor by Gascón-Vera and Marta-Lazo (2023), and parameters for the analysis of sitcoms (Bonaut-Iriarte and Grandío-Pérez, 2009; Pérez-Pereiro, 2007).

5. Results

5.1. Ideation of Aragonese film comedies

Directors find inspiration in their own experiences and cinematic preferences. Miguel Ángel Lamata sought "narrative tranquility" after two comedies characterized by "fast-paced humor," through characters that "appeared and wanted to speak." An original script that producer Raúl García read and kept "without changing a comma," with "simple production" due to Lamata's talent for

comedy and his influence from Woody Allen, which he complements with the "brilliant, funny, witty" dialogues of Neil Simon or Paddy Chayefsky.

Bendita calamidad is based on the novel of the same name by Miguel Mena. For director and screenwriter Gaizka Urresti, this previous success guaranteed a solid foundation to create "a comedy that could appeal to everyone, especially in Aragon." The film was described as a mix between *Atraco a las tres* and a "Fargo in the Aragonese style." As for *Miau*, Ignacio Estaregui also made a literary adaptation of Juan Luis Saldaña, with whom he claims to share a humor that "borderlines on magical realism." In his previous project, *Justi&CIA*, he stood out for conveying "the anger" of losing one's job: "A parallel journey, a reinterpretation of *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), and above all, of *Don Quixote*." Gaizka also places himself in a "buddy comedy with a Cervantine twist" and asserts that antagonistic adventure characters "always work," as they are rooted in culture like *El Lazarillo de Tormes* or *El Buscón*. Lamata, likewise, highlights this phenomenon in *Nuestros amantes*, even with an Aldonza Lorenzo, and mentions how "Terry Gilliam theorizes that almost any story is the story of Don Quixote."

On the other hand, Nacho García Velilla starts from stories, real headlines that he distorts in search of conveying traumatic conflicts through comedy. In *Villaviciosa de al lado*, the protagonist wins the lottery at the town's brothel. This story was shared with him by the producer, Mikel Lejarza, who believes that this director understands that comedy "arises from pain, from conflict," a practice that dates back to Chaplin, because "making people laugh doesn't necessarily start from pleasant situations." Next, García y García originates from an original idea by Carlos Lamela, which plays with the confusion of two individuals at an airport. Lamela sent this idea by letter to the then-president of the Spanish Academy of Cinema, Antonio Resines, who, thanks to his friendship and previous experiences, got in touch with the producer Joaquín Trincado. An interviewee placed the production in the context of 1990s American comedies, mentioning *What's Up, Doc?* (1972) by Peter Bogdanovich and *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) by Howard Hawks. Regarding this movie, Ana Murugarren adds to the inspiration with her admiration for Buñuel while seeking to connect with the American imaginary. Meanwhile, Pablo Aragüés, like the film's protagonists, lived in a Masonic house in Madrid for seven years and finds inspiration when facing supernatural events: *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1969), *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), *Beetlejuice* (Tim Burton, 1986), or *Palm Springs* (Max Barbakow, 2020).

Regarding the methods for creating comedy scripts, the directors have various approaches. Lamata focuses on character dialogues, seeking to create an emotional connection by leveraging the "good ideas" of the team. Urresti uses additional readers during the script phase, captures actor improvisations during filming, and conducts audience tests during editing to adjust the pacing. As detailed by his producer, Silvia Gómez, a comedy script "has to be funny (...) It's not just about creativity but also having a faster and fresher rhythm." García Velilla, on the other hand, tests ideas through questions like, "What would you do if you won the lottery?" He debates these questions with friends and colleagues to ensure that the premise is interesting enough to develop into "a good movie." He establishes the structure first, then develops the characters, and if both components work, he spends six months outlining before writing the dialogue.

Meanwhile, Murugarren starts with a high concept, as Lamata and Aragüés also support, and adapts the characters to the selected cast, which influences the script's development, involving several phases that are adjusted and refined. However, the final film is constructed based on the filmed material.

"It's crazy work: you create the outline, write the dialogue, rewrite it, change it again during rehearsals with the actors... and when you enter the editing room, you can throw the script away because from that point on, the movie takes on a life of its own". (Ana Murugarren).

The theme that runs through Estaregui's films is friendship and how older people are not actively involved in society. These are issues that "touch him involuntarily," and he prefers them to be in the background, leaving an impact but not taking the forefront. Nevertheless, he states that "comedy is one of the genres most connected to the present, even more so than drama; all it takes is for society to evolve, and gags are created based on that." In this regard, Murugarren does not believe that her film has social criticism, but it does depict the struggle of

the poor against the rich and situations like the power outage in Pepe Viyuela's family. Finally, Aragüés' comedy, as he explains, inherently involves the debate about adulthood and decision-making: real estate problems, motherhood, etc. He summarizes this idea as follows: "Of course, there is social criticism, and it's the beauty of it. I think humor is very necessary because usually social issues are approached through drama, not that it's wrong, but I highly value it when it's done through comedy like '*Life Is Beautiful*' or '*Life of Brian*'." (Pablo Aragüés).

5.2. The composition of current Aragonese comedy

The quintessential national genre, according to Lamata, emphasizes the emotional and the contradiction of the feeling of defeat. That's why he opts for characters with "a certain intrinsic stubbornness," prone to repeatedly stumble over the same obstacle, which he links to the Aragonese identity, in the following statement.

Humor, more than the ability to laugh, is that daily tool to keep us from going crazy, and this is what happens to the characters I write about, for whom that humor is a lifeline (Miguel Ángel Lamata).

According to Urresti, "comedy is a fantastic escape valve," and to achieve the viewer's empathy with the kidnappers, he took it "to the realm of grotesque, almost like a comic book," along with the rule of jokes: "you set up, plant, and break," because, in his opinion, the way to create comedy is well-tested. "It's a genre without tricks that either works or doesn't work, you either laugh or you don't. (...) These are movies that stay with you, and comedy is easier to revisit," as it helps the viewer retain information and details, as pointed out by Gómez. This "greatness" that Urresti mentions extends to subgenres like romantic and fantasy comedy and to techniques, including the "less common" action, continues Gómez, which is present in *García y García* and *Bendita calamidad*.

Estaregui emphasizes its social background and its departure from broad strokes or easy jokes in family or light-hearted comedies. They are not pure comedies but rather "flirt with drama," which, according to his producer, can be "quite challenging for the audience to manage." *Para entrar a vivir* is "a comedy with a difficult-to-define touch of fantasy," whose intrigue and subtle humor are better received in Protestant countries, which Estaregui attributes to "understanding life without guilt in the face of laughter."

García Velilla reflects on the framing of comedy and compares how drama has more common elements since "a death is always portrayed in the same way." On the other hand, Lejarza does not believe that comedy is superior, although he shares the criticism with Murugarren that it does not have the same relevance in festivals and awards, despite having "the same cinematic value as drama" and presenting additional challenges such as pacing. To which Trincado sums up that "comedy is the best" and recalls how, in its early days, "all cinema, without exception, was dedicated to comedy."

In the end, cinema is constantly revolving around the same thing. Ultimately, it's about telling stories with fresh faces, adapting to the times. Cinema is designed for popular consumption; we have to be competitive and attract the audience through comedy; family comedy is just as commendable (Joaquín Trincado).

These creators defend the relevance of comedic actors, considering them "privileged" for their ability to make people laugh and adapt to "serious or dramatic roles without breaking a sweat," as determined by Murugarren, who emphasizes the importance of an "extensive" casting process where actors internalize the characters to achieve "authentic interaction" during rehearsals, as explained by her producer. Aragüés follows a similar process, ensuring that through prior experimentation, technique is subservient to the comedic interpretation of the protagonists, whose complicity and "gift for comedy" are accentuated, as Urresti often does by using the cast from the *Oregón* Televisión format and promoting its national dissemination.

Combining document analysis and in-depth interviews with directors, producers, or individuals responsible for film production

García Velilla reveals his identification with ironic characters and believes that the true profiles are the unstable and over-the-top ones. Therefore, he prefers to create characters who cannot be sincere and generate “a thicker type of humor.” Lejarza believes that they must be capable of generating surprise linked to their personality and character because “humor always has to be an unexpected response to a common question.” Sendino believes that characters are not conditioned by genres but by historical periods, physical appearance, costumes, and characterization.

Lamata points out that “a stereotype in itself is not a bad thing; the bad thing is when artifice doesn't work in favor of the story.” García Velilla adds that they are useful for understanding the stories, that “commonplaces are good for comedy,” but from “untraveled” paths where “the character's journey and the hero's journey are different.” Also, Aragüés starts from archetypes but, through his creativity, seeks to counteract preconceptions, such as with a female character who doesn't want to have children. Likewise, Estaregui wonders, “Why do comedic characters have repeated traits over time?” To which he responds that it's a connection that works until it goes out of trend. It's a “cyclical” phenomenon that arises when someone dares to try something new. On the other hand, Murugarren prefers to leave some freedom in interpretation because, along with regionalisms, stereotypes can “overly define” characters.

“Saying that your film is intended for a geographically specific audience is shooting yourself in the foot,” summarizes Raúl García, emphasizing the importance of universalizing comedy beyond localisms, which Sendino claims can become “a burden.” As the producer of García y García emphasizes, Spain is a “small” market with 50 million inhabitants, so they avoid the local and the current, opting for a popular cast. In contrast, Urresti insists on the specificity of reaching “a viewer you know,” one who feels identified, as conveyed by his producer when discussing the film's distribution in Aragonese theaters. Estaregui and Velilla, on the other hand, believe that creating a work based on the viewer is impossible due to the “numerous” factors involved, to which Lejarza adds that the virtue lies in creating “good comedies” that pique interest and avoid boredom. They do incorporate details and language licenses that reinforce identity without losing the overall focus. These sentiments are reflected in the following words.

You always try to satisfy the largest possible audience, thinking about universal themes within the subject you're addressing, within the tone, which is very important in comedy. In the end, it's about telling stories that can be seen in as many places as possible, and if the viewer doesn't understand the local references, they won't go see it (Pablo Aragüés).

5.3. Cultural values in Aragonese film comedy

Murugarren points out that you can't know for sure what will make people laugh, so “you have to rely on your own instinct, your own taste, and hope that it works”. García Velilla shares this notion, avoids worrying about it, as well as being aware of practicing Aragonese humor.

“Some people and actors attribute to me the somarda humor, I'm very much about saying one thing while expressing the opposite. I identify it in my friends, and people identify it in me, so it must exist, but I don't sit down to write and deliberately include something somarda, I actually have it inside me.” (Nacho García Velilla).

Murugarren points out that you cannot know for sure what will make people laugh, so “you have to trust your own instinct, your own taste, and hope it works.” García Velilla shares this idea, avoids worrying about it, as well as being aware of practicing Aragonese humor.

Lamata also says that he is not consciously practicing somarda humor and shares a “designation of origin” that defines the way Aragonese comedy is understood. Raúl García defines somarda humor through irony, a double layer of irony that, from another angle, is reflected in Oregón TV and is associated with directors like Urresti, Lamata, Buñuel, Saura, and Forqué. However, he specifies that “it has more to do with Monty Python than with *Los Morancos*.” He also states that it “uses less ellipsis and metaphor and is too direct” and that it “comes

naturally” in actors like Jorge Usón and his “down-to-earth, direct, and sarcastic character,” as validated by Aragüés.

“Everyone has made comedy about who we are,” Lejarza summarizes about the global genre of the everyday, to which Trincado alludes to the cliché and national reference of Paco Martínez Soria because “we are all culturally similar.” This sentiment is shared by Murugarren, who sees Aragonese humor “as humor from everywhere.” Therefore, all the directors, except Urresti, refuse to create somarda comedy per se but treasure their identity. “Leaving an Aragonese imprint is inevitable,” reflects Lamata about the shooting in José Antonio Labordeta Park. The power of location is highlighted by Nacho García Velilla, who sees it as a personal endeavor to “promote the region” and maintain his identity after the “anger” of leaving his homeland. He says that filming in Aragon “doesn’t compensate,” as nearly eight weeks of shooting in Villaviciosa cost an additional 800,000 euros. Despite increasing production costs, it revitalizes the need for identity. In his words, “when there are no movies or songs that tell the story of your city, your land has no narrative, and those cities and communities are poorer.” Although, in this quest, as Sendino points out, they do not promote their own customs as seen in *Nobleza baturra* (Florián Rey, 1935).

For Gómez, production is affected by the need to hire local actors and shoot in recognizable locations, “finding a balance between cost and creativity.” According to Raúl García, their challenge was to shoot in all three provinces, and Aragüés talks about “privileged” locations with Zaragoza strategically positioned, being “a city where millions of things happen,” as emphasized by Estaregui, and where he wants to continue making universal movies on its streets, thanks to the affection and magic he receives from the people. Aragonese people whom Lamata mentions are “extraordinarily generous” when it comes to watching their films, despite their disparities.

“I don’t think there is now a specific line of comedy being done in Aragon,” Trincado sums up the general feeling of the interviewees, who also, like Raúl García, believe that “they are all very different, with very different budgets and sizes.” Regarding trends, Lamata observes how current comedy is revisiting “the most significant events and social pillars of 21st-century Spain.” However, he admits not having a specific direction, perhaps it is a combination of factors that not only reflect culture but also the films themselves. In this sense, Sendino suggests that the true legacy is “the growing production” that will eventually “define this specific moment in Aragonese cinematic culture.” Lejarza addresses the future with the desire to “make good films” and considers that cinema has no homeland, only the privilege of “being Aragonese.” Success depends on talent and the awareness to “create an environment where Aragonese cinema is an established part of culture, just as other cinemas existed in Spain,” says Aragüés.

5.4. Funding strategies for Aragonese comedy

The financing from CARTV aims to “help production companies” without making a distinction by genres, evaluating the overall project because it is “solid, a good idea, and made by or with people from here,” explains producer Silvia Gómez. Although the contributions “are not very high amounts, proportionally to the final budget of a film,” she adds, they are a show of trust to secure more financing by scoring and not being incompatible.

“CARTV alone is not a driving force; in the case of *Bendita calamidad*, it represented 10% of the budget,” says Urresti, highlighting the particularity that comedy seems to need public support to be profitable. In 2016, “a considerable amount of money” was obtained through nominative formulas that allowed productions like *Nuestros amantes*, where CARTV “got involved from the beginning,” explains its producer. He and director Aragüés emphasize that the support from Aragón Televisión and regional grants has increased since the 1990s. The first entity is described as “essential” and “important” by Sendino and Trincado, who also highlight the excellent work of the commercial department while encouraging the search for competitiveness through popularity, linking comedy to television audiences. As Lejarza relates to Atresmedia’s preferences, comedy is the only film material that works on television, thanks to its promotional advantages.

Without advertising, the sector doesn't exist. Films produced by television networks themselves have the added element, compared to independent producers, of self-promotion; and promoting comedy is very easy, you just need to take the best jokes and create a good trailer (Mikel Lejarza).

The challenge is to reach theaters and all screens through a “financial puzzle” of great complexity due to the deadlines and requirements, as summarized by Trincado: a national generalist television network, a partner like a streaming platform, a network of investors seeking tax benefits, the Spanish government through its general grants, and “essential” regional support to bring ideas to life. For Murugarren, money provides “more time for shooting” and improving production. For example, without those funds, *García y García* wouldn't have been able to incorporate the number of special effects, as the director recounts.

Similarly, financing *Nuestros amantes* was a challenge, according to García, as they had to shoot the film before selling it to Netflix. They also received funding from the Government of Aragón, although they had to renegotiate due to a political change, and received support from the Provincial Governments as they filmed in all three provinces. This type of complement is a constant in all productions since funding is the most complex part of production, as Sendino points out, acknowledging that they couldn't make their productions “without the support of Aragonese institutions.”

Most of the interviewees criticize the preference of CARTV for “supporting more projects with less money than betting on a few with a lot of money,” as García mentions. Aragüés advocates for an increase in funding to move from budgets of half a million euros to films of over a million, which would allow for a “true Aragón brand.” According to him, his “films have ended up on Netflix, in 180 countries, and the first thing you see is the Aragón Televisión logo, from the Government of Aragón,” he emphasizes. Such a leap would bring cultural, economic, and professional benefits. On this matter, the creators of Aragonese cinema highlight Aragón's qualities as a natural setting, comparing it, as Aragüés does, to New Zealand, noting that if they had access to tax incentives, they would attract more productions, which provide a return for citizens, he continues to argue, explaining that cinema benefits the restaurant and hotel industry and, if successful, even generates film tourism.

Regular film production would not only create jobs in the region but also foster the continuity of production companies and promote talent. “We should try to create new generations of creators, an incubator for screenwriters, directors who will tell your story in your land, something that will have an impact on you and that you will recover,” García Velilla faces as a challenge. In addition, as a director who leads projects of over five million euros, he calculates that, with five other directors, they could reach investments of 20 or 30 million, highlighting that cinema involves very rapid expenses, despite being a complicated cultural activity.

“They call us subsidized in the film industry, how dare they, the banks are subsidized, they give us crumbs,” Murugarren claims, pointing out that to make a film “reasonably well,” you need three or four million euros, and getting that money “is extremely difficult” because the grants amount to “very small sums.” Estaregui advocates for a willingness to listen and real changes in the financing system; not settling for the idea that it's “better not to touch” the film support calls but seeking improvements and opportunities for the industry. In this line of future perspectives, García advocates for 100% Aragonese productions, where local talent is not expelled by external projects and complicated requirements. Thus, the creators are immersed in new film projects, Lamata and García in a thriller in Teruel; Aragüés shoots a production in the three provinces in the fall of 2024, while Gaizka and García Velilla have filmed new comedies in Aragón, titled “*Tozudos*” and “*Menudas piezas*.” Their own stories to maintain their identity because, according to Murugarren, the biggest challenge for comedians “is to create images to make people laugh.”

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The comedy, to generate amusement, combines various aspects: romantic, burlesque, and costumbrista, which repeat as a predominant formula along with identifying features (Altman, 2000). The confusion of identities, present in García and García, and misunderstandings intertwine with deception, failure, wit, naivety (Arconada, 2007), and crime (Campos, 1997), in works like *Villaviciosa*, *Miau*, or *Bendita calamidad*.

These elements extend to characters in Aragonese comedy who seek to establish empathy with the viewer. As an inherent function of comedy (Ferraz and Cabral, 2019), through its subversive laughter, they question the everyday, such as motherhood in *Para entrar a Vivir*, love in *Nuestros Amantes*, and the non-conformity of *Justi&CIA*. A struggle of the new Don Quixote's (Villegas-López, 2003), who start from tragedy to venture into situations rooted in the popular, with witty dialogues and subtleties, in the style of Ernst Lubitsch, so classical comedy is intertwined with 21st-century comedy. These creations are characterized by originating from literary adaptations and fantastic elements without losing their taste for irony (Del-Amo, 2009), reflecting the somarda cinema.

Although Paco Martínez Soria's films sought projection and identification (Pérez-Morán, 2022), localisms tend to be avoided, maintaining the premise of conveying a moral lesson. From the antithesis between town and city to the contrast between pragmatism and dreams, ethics or money. Bourdieu (1992) rejects adapting expectations to the largest number of spectators, but this dichotomy is overcome in Aragonese comedy, considering the universality of the audience supported by Jullier's industrial logic (2006), linking success to technique, originality, and the coherence of unique characters that rely on innovative stereotypes with an important function, making people laugh.

For filmmakers, the biggest challenge is to reflect a story in a territory, emphasizing the importance of locations and small nods, as "the story is inferred from a narrative, it does not exist without it" (Sánchez-Noriega, 2002, p. 694). The narrative is essential to give meaning to territories (Lagny, 1997), as cinema reflects the ways of thinking and feeling of a society. Creators have the power to decide what and how to tell it (Aguilar-Carrasco, 1998), something fundamental to generate interest. This generation of filmmakers comes from the television medium and highlights the importance of promotion and mass media to obtain commercial returns that support solid financing, given how difficult it can be to obtain significant state and public financial aid. In this sense, it is argued that cinema must overcome the view of a forced concession (Casado, 2005), as regional audiovisual industries have great economic potential (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2012; Díaz-González, 2016).

Comedy stands out for its more affordable costs and for reflecting a strong social and cultural connection, with its own faces, themes, and places (Huerta-Floriano, 2005). This has been the focus described by the protagonists of these film creations, through a method that observes in-depth, with interaction fields, avoiding falling into clichés and disregarding the fallacious idea (Del-Amo, 2009) that entertainment content lacks interest, as argued by Josep María Catalá (2001), who believes that "reflection on practice is absolutely necessary" (p. 24).

Regarding this practice, in part, the first hypothesis is confirmed because each creator follows their own model, although with shared references that adapt to the particularities of each story. In the creative process, directors follow a phase-based structure in which they combine improvisation and intuitive writing of original scripts, as well as other modalities like Aragonese literary adaptations or using real news as a documentary source, which they intertwine with their personal experiences as internal starting points. They also combine these elements with various cinematic references that, however, converge in classic American and 1990s comedy, along with their decision on the comedic tone, which defines their particular style.

The results indicate that Aragonese comedy adapts to the identity of the region (H2), although cultural values are relegated to almost imperceptible expressions or are raised through the choice of Aragonese actors to promote local talent. Each comedy is unique, highlighting elements such as dialogues, Quixotic archetypes, and emotional intrigue that scripts portray in witty and surpassed characters, with their own journey from which they admit stereotypes that they reformulate with new approaches to capture the audience.

"The comedy, to generate amusement, combines various aspects: romantic, burlesque, and costumbrista, which repeat as a predominant formula along with identifying features"

H3 is partially verified, as interviewees point out that Aragonese comedy in recent years has experienced development without following a uniform trend but has maintained identity elements of somarda humor. Due to its wit and double layer of irony, it is a distinctive feature present in various forms of comedy, such as ensemble, dialogue-driven, dramatic, dark, family, and action.

No mention of mockery or exaggeration, but rather of ellipsis and metaphor. Although this is not the main leitmotiv of all the films, it is present in a relevant way. Nevertheless, Aragonese comedy seeks to achieve a universal character in order to attract the largest possible number of spectators, which has led it to move away from localisms. In this sense, two currents can be identified in Aragonese comedy: one that uses Aragonese humor as a base and another that defends universal humor.

Popular comedy encompasses a wide diversity of creative forms and styles. While social criticism is addressed secondarily, directors and/or producers filter their concerns through narrative and stylistic identifying keys that use humor as a social catalyst and avoid current topics to ensure the continuity of these comedies. For this development, creators request greater economic support to achieve higher-quality resources, emphasizing the importance of economic aid and promotion to enhance the visibility of comedy in the film industry. Despite the institutional support of CARTV contributing to cinematographic development in general, Aragonese comedy requires a more specific focus due to its complexity and consumption capacity, as posed by the fourth premise (H4).

In conclusion, Aragonese comedy is characterized by its diversity in form and budget and converges in the origins of the filmmakers who drive it. The challenge is to promote a creative talent pool with more solid funding to carry out larger projects that strengthen the film industry, generate employment, and cultural benefits. In Aragon, which has the potential to become a true cinematographic reference, thanks to its natural richness and the work of a group of filmmakers with great potential in a time of innovation in Aragonese cinema, with the main goal of providing the greatest satisfaction: making the audience laugh.

7. References

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