

The executive-creative producer of fiction series in the Spanish television industry

Productor ejecutivo-creativo de series de ficción en la industria televisiva española

O produtor executivo-criativo de séries de ficção na indústria televisiva espanhola

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ABSTRACT | This article analyses the role of the executive producer during the fiction TV series production process in Spain, with emphasis on the creative features. To do so, we used a qualitative methodology to review the executive-creative producer concept, as well as the duties and responsibilities developed by this professional in each phase of the production process. Additionally, the study is completed with testimonies from eleven interviews with sixteen executive producers in the contemporary Spanish television industry, which were developed during the last quarter of 2017. Despite the wide range of production models, the findings obtained suggest that the cited profile plays an active and growing role over contemporary Spanish TV series creativity. The international approach of these projects is noteworthy, especially thanks to the implantation of streaming platforms in this country.

KEYWORDS: executive producer; creative producer; TV series; television production; showrunner; Spain; interviews.

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RESUMEN | Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el protagonismo que adquiere el productor ejecutivo en el proceso de producción de series de ficción y su implicación en las facetas creativas. Con esta finalidad, se realiza una revisión del concepto de productor ejecutivo-creativo, así como de sus funciones y responsabilidades en cada fase del proceso. El trabajo se complementa con testimonios extraídos de once entrevistas a dieciséis destacados productores ejecutivos de la industria televisiva española realizadas durante el último trimestre del año 2017. A pesar de la variedad de modelos de actuación obtenidos, los resultados evidencian la relevancia activa y creciente de este profesional en los aspectos creativos de la producción televisiva española, así como la proyección internacional de sus trabajos, especialmente gracias a la implantación de las plataformas de streaming en este país.

PALABRAS CLAVE: productor ejecutivo; productor creativo; series de televisión; producción televisiva; showrunner; España; entrevistas.

RESUMO | O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar o protagonismo que o produtor executivo assume no processo de produção das séries de ficção e seu envolvimento com os aspectos criativos. Com essa finalidade, se realiza uma revisão do conceito de produtor executivo-criativo, assim como de suas funções e responsabilidades em cada fase do processo. Este trabalho complementa-se com testemunhas extraídas de onze entrevistas a dezesseis destacados produtores executivos da indústria televisiva espanhola realizadas durante o último trimestre de 2017. Apesar da variedade de modelos de atuação obtidos, os resultados evidenciam a relevância ativa e crescente deste profissional nos aspectos criativos da produção televisiva espanhola, bem como a projeção internacional de seus trabalhos, especialmente graças à implementação de plataformas de streaming no país.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: produtor executivo; produtor criativo; séries de televisão; produção televisiva; showrunner; Espanha; entrevistas.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the growing tendency to produce television fiction series has led the audiovisual sector to base its business model on them in countries such as Spain, the sixth in the world in the export of this type of projects. The audiovisual industry in the country has achieved prominence. According to the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Tourism (*Situación de la Industria Audiovisual en España*, n.d.), it represents 28% of the cultural industries, which also contribute a total of 3.2% to the national GDP.

Among the potential of the audiovisual market in Spain, the PwC report (2018) highlights the professional and creative talent of media workers and the international positioning of Spanish content, especially thanks to digital platforms, noting the forecast of a 10.1% increase in CAGR1 in the OTT (over-the-top) video segment in 2022.

In this context, special attention is paid by the industry, the audience, and the academy to the figure of the executive-creative producer due to the quantitative and qualitative increase of fiction series and the prominence of that figure in their production. In the American field, the concept of showrunner arises to designate that professional and highlight his/her presence in each of the phases of the process, especially from a creative perspective, propitiating his/her involvement in the aesthetic result of the work (Higuera-Ruiz et al., 2018). In the words of Cascajosa (2018b), “The emergence of the showrunner [...] has been one of the more relevant developments in contemporary television. [...] the showrunner is not only an industrial position, but also a critical role in increasing the prestige of television fiction” (p.126).

Despite the difficulty of defining this profile in the contemporary Spanish industry, due to its constant evolution and the inaccurate assignment of the title on certain occasions, we consider it appropriate to understand and refer to the executive producer as executive-creative producer. This is the person ultimately responsible for the fiction series, in charge of hiring and supervising the different departments, who maintains fluid communication, both with “the different teams, who must work in a coordinated manner, adjusting to the deadlines and budgets foreseen, and having unity of creative vision to achieve the prefixed quality standard” (Pardo, 2014, p. 63), and with the other agents that constitute the television market: television networks and platforms.

The prominence acquired by this professional, especially thanks to the emergence and implementation of OTT services in Spain, which encourage the

1. Compound Annual Growth Rate.

association of projects with their executive-creative producer and the promotion of these through these professionals, motivates and justifies the attention from the academic field. In contrast to the numerous works that focus on the series' content, those aimed at the study of the production and creation processes represent a minority, although there is an increase in their number (Mateos-Pérez, 2021). This article addresses this issue with an original contribution to the studies of media production that allows to know the tasks, competences, and responsibilities of the executive-creative producer in Spain from the practical perspective of his/her performance. It seeks to contribute to strengthen the corresponding theoretical basis, glimpsing the particularities of Spanish television production in the last decade, during which its "development has been driven by economic, technological, and cultural factors so different from the near past that it is possible to speak of a serialized revolution of national fiction" (Huerta Floriano, 2020, p. 15).

This paper studies the production process of television fiction series in Spain in the last decade (2010-2020) from the perspective of the profile of the executive-creative producer (showrunner), considering his/her position and relationships within the industrial fabric of the contemporary television market. The main objective is to know and analyze the ways in which this professional performs his/her work within the Spanish context, considering the novelties in the production strategies of OTT platforms, the creative implications of the producer, and the aesthetic result of the fiction he/she creates and produces.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The profile and concept of the executive producer stands out for its complexity, both from an academic and professional perspective, and may encompass different typologies and competencies depending on the production company and the industrial fabric of the country where he/she works, as well as the audiovisual project itself (Diego, 2005). However, regardless of the aforementioned factors, there is a series of characteristics linked to such a profile and allow defining him/her as "the main responsible for the creative and economic control of the program [who] must be a skilled businessman and also possess a high degree of artistic sensitivity" (Medina de la Viña & Moreno Díaz, 2020, pp. 41-43). The executive producer oversees applying the so-called production standards: "the creative, technical, and organizational parameters that characterize fiction contents from the production point of view, and that have to do with one of the three variables: time, cost, and quality" (Diego & Pardo, 2008, p. 62).

In the history of Spanish television fiction, we notice three periods that denote an evolutionary character and constant change in the production of these projects,

with in all cases a creative component in the figure of the producer. A first period, of monopoly of *Televisión Española*, in which an own production is developed, of authorial nature and led by producers-authors with tasks of direction and scriptwriting. A second period of industrialization of the sector due to the creation of private channels and the transfer of production to external and independent companies (García de Castro, 2002). Finally, a third stage led by the advances in digitalization, in which the implementation of OTT platforms stands out, and with variants in the production, distribution, and consumption of fiction series and the growing role of the showrunner in this process (Cascajosa, 2019).

The creative tasks and implications linked to the producer have their origin in the cinematographic world, where professionals such as the British David Puttman stand out, who “is creatively involved in each of his films, to the point of being as responsible for the final result as the director. Thus, he is called creative producer or producer-author” (Pardo, 2001, p. 117).

In the field of television fiction, the executive producer must have the following characteristics: knowledge of the medium, executive skills, quality criteria, technical, artistic and creative knowledge, and administrative competence (Medina de la Viña & Moreno Díaz, 2020). Although the adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon concept of executive producer does not occur with total symmetry in the Spanish media, the executive producer must also respond to a double executive-creative profile (García de Castro, 2002) to determine the format and adjust the budget to his/her creative aspirations from the first idea.

This profile can also adopt the credit and functions of the director or screenwriter, with the creative options that this entails (Kellison, 2009). In Spain, the scriptwriter-director-producer combination is not as common as in the North American industry, although “in Spanish financed production this work scheme is being adopted, so that the coordinators of the creative teams are also executive producers” (Medina de la Viña & Moreno Díaz, 2020, p. 41).

In the assignment of executive producer tasks and credit to script coordinators we must highlight the pioneering work developed in Spain by the company Globomedia (Diego, 2005). Following this line, the executive producer who occupies the first position in the teams’ hierarchy –the showrunner– must have the powers that allow him/her to supervise the development of the idea and the writing of the scripts (Cascajosa, 2016).

The executive producer does not always have the original idea of the fiction, although the concept of showrunner is sometimes used as a synonym of creator and contributes to the consideration of the television author (De la Torre, 2016).

In any case, we are facing a collaborative work where the producer delegates to each team member, who contributes to the result of the project under his/her supervision and coordination, so that coherence is maintained and the established line is not distorted (Higuera-Ruiz et al., 2019). Therefore, this professional represents “the common thread that gives unity to the complex production process followed by all television fiction” (Diego, 2005, p. 9).

Fiction series production stages and competencies of the executive producer

In the development phase of the project idea, the executive producer decides the format according to the program’s audience and style (Pardo, 2014). Likewise, he/she owns or manages the copyright of the idea and prepares the material to make the pitch to the network (Collie, 2007).

In the meeting with the network executives, the feasibility of the proposal must be presented at the creative, technical, commercial, and legal levels (Pardo, 2014), and the production, narrative, and aesthetic parameters must be established to develop the fiction series considering the variety of professionals who will work on it (Barroso, 2002). When the network or platform accepts the project, the hiring of the different teams begins, giving rise to the pre-production phase. Along with the tasks that the executive producer develops from an economic and organizational perspective (hiring, budgets, technical script breakdown, shooting schedule) (Kellison, 2009), the most interesting issue from a creative point of view is the script’s development.

Before starting filming, it is advisable to have finished writing the scripts for the entire season (Kellison, 2009), so that the producer can fully attend to the other departments during the production phase. At this stage, the executive producer supervises the shooting, where he/she will ideally be present or available to review the television shots, as well as to solve any problems or doubts (Schihl, 1997). The relationship with the director is essential and, although “the producer has the power, both from an aesthetic and creative point of view, to accept or reject the video shots that are made throughout the work” (Schihl, 1997, p. 69), he/she is part of and depends on a team.

In the post-production stage, three fundamental aspects are dealt with: editing, visual effects, and sound. The executive producer may also be involved in promoting, distributing, and commercially exploiting the work produced, making his/her creative influence evident (Pardo, 2014).

Industrial fabric of the television media in Spain

In the television industry, the executive producer must maintain a relationship of understanding and good communication with the network executives, who

finally decide on the viability of the project (Medina, 2015). Depending on the degree of involvement and the technical, human, financial, and creative responsibilities acquired by each agent, a production modality is established; the associated one stands out, in which the network commissions the development of the project to a production company, appoints an associate producer, and provides the necessary funding (Ortiz, 2018). Currently, television channels operate as multimedia conglomerates that bring together various communication sectors (Corporación RTVE, Atresmedia, and Mediaset). This is due to “the entry into the market of novel and powerful technological agents and the change in citizens’ culture consumption habits” (Pérez-Ruffí, 2020, p. 240).

In this scenario, the implementation of OTT platforms in the Spanish television market stands out, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO Spain, Disney+, Movistar+ or Filmin, joining the so-called streaming wars (Neira, 2020). To delve deeper into these aspects, we consider the predominance of Netflix (Heredia Ruiz, 2017) –which since 2018 has a production headquarters in Madrid, Spain, as the company’s European headquarter (Lacalle et al., 2019)– and of the Spanish Movistar+ platform, among those that have established alliances to offer their services to the audience jointly and cheaply (Castro & Cascajosa, 2020). Blakey (2017) describes a series of changes in the processes of creation and production of fiction series, in their content and aesthetics. Production times are more agile than in generalist networks, giving rise to the strategy called by Netflix straight-to-series: they do not produce a pilot episode and ensure a real budget for the entire season (Carrillo-Bernal, 2018). This means incorporating simultaneously to the catalog all the episodes of the season of their own series and their possible viewing at once, promoting the binge-watching effect (Neira, 2020).

The most valued novelties refer to the projects’ format, topic, and aesthetics; there is an important creative innovation that is being adopted by generalist channels (Huerta Floriano, 2020), which also offer their contents in online portals. We find series of duration adjusted to international parameters, aimed at a niche audience, and with a marked cinematographic style, sometimes thanks to the incorporation of directors coming from that medium, especially in Movistar+ (Cascajosa, 2018a), with high budgets allocated to their original projects².

These services allow the virality of series such as *La Casa de Papel*, which, according to García Martínez (2020), is precisely due to “Netflix and its virtuous circle of globalization, which have made it the most popular Spanish popular culture product known worldwide by millennials and series addicts” (p. 100).

2. Series such as *La Peste* or *La Unidad* had a budget of 10 million euros.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

This research applies a qualitative methodology, consisting of a literature review discussed in the theoretical framework and in-depth interviews. On the one hand, we consulted national and international works specialized in the production of television fiction audiovisual projects: the characteristics of the executive-creative producer (Pardo, 2009, 2014), the tasks of the profile in each phase of the production process (Collie, 2007; Kellison, 2009; Marzal-Felici & López-Cantos, 2008), the industrial structure of the television medium (Medina, 2015; Medina de la Viña & Moreno Díaz, 2020), and the digital landscape (Carrillo-Bernal, 2018; Cascajosa, 2018a, 2019; Neira, 2020).

This bibliographic review makes it possible to synthesize the tasks of the executive-creative producer in the television context according to the tasks applied by this professional in each phase of the production process and to the two categories that define the duality of the profile: executive and creative. The results are presented according to the economic-organizational (table 1) or creative (table 2) nature of these functions and the established stages.

Phase	Stage	Tasks
Product design and market research	Project development: the idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choose project profile or format - Study the market of TV networks - Manage copyrights of the original idea - Manage the available budget
	Preproduction: the script	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hiring the human, technical and creative team - Manage insurance and licenses - Supervise the established budget
Production or fabrication	Production: shooting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Control the work plan - Manage resources and aspects of production - Follow-up of the established budget
	Post-production: editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supervise the editing: editing, visual effects and sound effects - Control the budget and agreed deadlines
Marketing	Promotion and distribution: the marketing campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment: time, cost and quality - Involvement during exhibition and distribution - Intervention in commercial exploitation

Table 1. Summary of the economic-organizational tasks of the executive producer in the television industry

Source: Higuera-Ruiz (2020), based on Marzal-Felici & López-Cantos (2008), Kellison (2009), & Pardo (2014).

Fase	Etapas	Tareas
Product design and market research	Project development: the idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elaborate the project-proposal - Establish the economic, technical, and creative parameters - Make the pitch to the network
	Preproduction: the script	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intervene in script development - Control of the script-budget relationship - Supervise casting, sets, locations, costumes, make-up...
Production or fabrication	Production: shooting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supervision or presence on set - Manage problems and critical situations - Solve issues related to the script
	Post-production: editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intervene in the pre-master editing: evaluations and changes. - Sound and music proposals - Creative quality control
Marketing	Promotion and distribution: the marketing campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oversee creative content for marketing campaigns, merchandising, distribution platforms...

Table 2. Summary of the creative tasks of the executive producer in the television industry

Source: Higuera-Ruiz (2020), based on Marzal-Felici & López-Cantos (2008), Kellison (2009), & Pardo (2014).

The data obtained from the literature review have been complemented with the results of 11 in-depth interviews conducted during the last quarter of 2017 to 16 prominent executive producers of Spanish fiction series. The selection factors of the sample are closely linked to the fiction series they produce, indicating their latest work as a reference to obtain a representative sample according to three main criteria:

1. The development of the executive producer’s profile in the series’ production process, and its corresponding credit, also valuing the assignment of the original creation of the project.
2. The selection of at least one professional (or professional couple) who has worked in one of the linear television channels, public (TVE) or private (Antena3, Telecinco) operating in Spain or in the two OTT platforms with the largest own production in television fiction and number of subscribers fully established in that country: Netflix (SVOD) and Movistar+ (IPTV) (Barlovento Comunicación, 2020).
3. The predominant performance of the professional during the last decade (2010-2020), the projects produced or issued in that period.

Likewise, we also considered the variety of genre (drama and comedy) of the fiction series produced and the gender (male and female) of the selected professionals. With these inclusion criteria, we sought to reach a representative sample to glimpse the differences found in the executive producer's performance, especially in OTT platforms. Table 3 presents the sample of professionals in alphabetical order.

The interview is widely used in media production studies to learn about the performance of audiovisual industry professionals, as well as their relationship with the different agents and contexts involved in the production process (Bruun, 2016). It allows obtaining "direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (Patton, 1988, p. 7). In this case, a qualitative, flexible, open, and semi-structured interview was applied (Flick, 2012). A previous guide was elaborated, based on the literature review (table 4), although new topics were accepted during the interview.

Name	TV Series	Genre	Network
David Abajo & David Fernández	<i>Ella es tu padre</i> (2017)	Comedy	Telecinco
Olatz Arroyo & Marta Sánchez	<i>Supernormal</i> (2021)	Comedy	Movistar+
Pablo Barrera	<i>Brigada Costa del Sol</i> (2019)	Drama	Telecinco
Ramón Campos	<i>Alta Mar</i> (2019)	Drama	Netflix
Juan Carlos Cueto & Rocío Martínez Llano	<i>Toy Boy</i> (2019)	Drama	Antena 3
Verónica Fernández	<i>Hache</i> (2019-)	Drama	Netflix
Darío Madrona & Carlos Montero	<i>Élite</i> (2018-)	Drama	Netflix
Pilar Nadal	<i>Águila Roja</i> (2009-2016)	Drama	TVE
Javier Olivares	<i>El Ministerio del Tiempo</i> (2015-2020)	Drama	TVE
Álex Pina	<i>White Lines</i> (2020)	Drama	Netflix
Alberto & Jorge Sánchez Cabezudo	<i>La Zona</i> (2017)	Drama	Movistar+

Table 3. Professionals interviewed and productions they oversee

Source: Own elaboration.

Section	Questions
<p>Section I: The showrunner as executive-creative producer</p>	<p>Who is the showrunner? What skills and abilities does he/she develop? What is his or her position in the production company's organizational chart? Is the production model associated with the figure of the showrunner feasible or is it utopian in practice? When did this profile emerge? Has it always existed? Does a showrunner profile exist in Spain, as it does in the United States? Why has it reached the popularity it enjoys today? How does the showrunner influence the aesthetic features of the television series? Can he/she be considered as the author of television fiction projects? Is there a creative stamp in the fiction series of the same showrunner linked to his or her performance? Which production companies in Spain have a recognizable creative seal?</p>
<p>Section II: The process of production of fiction series</p>	<p>Pre-production: What are the functions of the showrunner in the script department? Is the figure of the scriptwriter-producer appropriate? How could he/she contribute to the success of the program? How is the work dynamic in the script department? What is the relationship between the showrunner and other scriptwriters? How are screenwriting credits distributed? What other duties does the showrunner perform during pre-production?</p> <p>Production: What are the showrunner's duties during the shooting? Is he/she present? How is his relationship with the episode director?</p> <p>Post-production: What are the showrunner's duties during post-production? What is the showrunner's relationship with the editor? Who makes the decision about the final cut?</p>
<p>Section III: The panorama of television in Spain</p>	<p>According to academics, we are immersed in the Third Golden Age of Television, is this true? what can we base it on? How does digitalization influence the television market in Spain? What is the relationship between the showrunner and the network? Can network executives change the original idea of the project? How do network executives influence the creativity of the show? What changes are taking place in the television industry as a result of the implementation of OTT platforms in Spain?</p>

Table 4. Interview guidelines

Source: Own elaboration.

The questions were classified in three sections: 1) the showrunner as executive-creative producer, 2) the production process of fiction series, and 3) the panorama of television in Spain. Introductory questions of a biographical nature were included, despite a previous curriculum review of each professional, to start the session creating a comfortable atmosphere, and others of a concluding nature to synthesize and finish the meeting. The scheme of questions may vary when the profile and professional trajectory of the interviewee motivate to pay more attention to certain questions than to others.

During the meetings, the professionals authorized the audio recording of the session, as well as the use of the data in a non-anonymized form in the context of this research. The subsequent transcription of the audio facilitates the interpretation and extraction of the relevant testimonies in each case. To this end, the responses are analyzed according to the thematic sections, comparing the information and defining the results that articulate the discourse.

RESULTS

The showrunner as executive-creative producer

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the executive producer must respond to a dual executive-creative profile to determine the format and adjust the budget to his/her creative aspirations from the first idea. According to Juan Carlos Cueto³, executive producer along with Rocío Martínez of *Mar de Plástico* (Antena 3, 2015-2016) or *Toy Boy* (Antena 3, 2019), “when you start writing you already know, for example, the percentage of exteriors that you will have agreed with the production management”. In the same vein, Pablo Barrera⁴, executive producer of *Brigada Costa del Sol* (Telecinco, 2019), affirms that this professional “has to be a figure, which there are not many, who combines the artistic, the creative, and, at the same time, has the ability to manage the purely material”.

To ensure the project’s quality levels and budget adjustment, the producer must supervise the work done in the different teams. This is how Álex Pina⁵, executive producer of series such as *La Casa de Papel* (Antena 3, 2017-2018; Netflix, 2019-2020) or *El Embarcadero* (Movistar+, 2019-2020) puts it: “executive producers are in the script, but we are also in the editing room, in the casting, and in all the meetings

3. Juan Carlos Cueto and Rocío Martínez, interviewed by the author, November 16 and November 22, 2017.

4. Pablo Barrera, interviewed by the author, October 10, 2017.

5. Álex Pina, interviewed by the author, November 23, 2017.

that are important for the series to have certain characteristics, i.e., something that differentiates it”.

On the other hand, as an example of the scriptwriter-director-producer combination (Kellison, 2009), in Spain the producers of *Crematorio* (Canal+ 1, 2011) and *La Zona* (Movistar+, 2017), Jorge and Alberto Sánchez-Cabezudo⁶, combine both profiles and their responsibilities. Juan Carlos Cueto adds that he usually works with teams of three people to make all the decisions: “one on set, who is more with actors and in the day-to-day shooting, and two others who are more concerned with the scripts”.

Executive producers who have worked at Globomedia appreciate the system of promotion to greater creative responsibilities, based on practical training, professional experience, and trust. The idea is to adapt the “North American model, in which the creative producer has been given importance for years”, adds Juan Carlos Cueto.

Regarding the scriptwriter-director-producer relationship, and the powers of supervising the development of the idea and scriptwriting, Ramón Campos⁷, co-founder of *Bambú Producciones* along with Teresa Fernández-Valdés, and executive producer of *Las Chicas del Cable* (Netflix, 2017-2018) or *Fariña* (Antena 3, 2018), states that “being a good screenwriter does not mean being a good executive producer, just as a good executive producer does not have to be a good screenwriter, there are many parts to put together and if you get them all you have a good executive producer”. Similarly, Javier Olivares⁸, executive producer of the series *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (TVE, 2015-2020), expresses that “a showrunner can be a producer, screenwriter, or director. The important thing is that, whether he/she is a scriptwriter or not, he/she is in the embryo of an idea”, and thus states that “the most creative profession in this business is neither the scriptwriter nor the director, it is the producer”.

It is common for the executive producer to come from the script department, however, “his/her power will depend on the weight he/she has within the production company”, being under the supervision of the owner of the latter, says David Fernández⁹, executive producer along with David Abajo of fiction series such as *Ella es tu Padre* (Telecinco, 2017). Faced with such casuistry, in the last decade

6. Jorge and Alberto Sánchez-Cabezudo, interviewed by the author, December 11, 2017.

7. Ramón Campos, interviewed by the author, December 4, 2017.

8. Javier Olivares, interviewed by the author, October 17, 2017.

9. David Fernandez and David Abajo, interviewed by the author, November 28 and December 22, 2017.

small production companies have been created led by a scriptwriter-producer who has the creative and financial freedom to develop projects with a marked personal nature. Among others, we highlight the case of Javier Olivares, founder of Cliffhanger, who notes that we are facing “an invented formula that allows you to be creative”, or Álex Pina, creator of Vancouver Media, who adds: “Having your own company allows you to safeguard your stamp, your look, and your DNA. Then you do what you want and grow at the pace you want”.

The production process of fiction series

The interviewees agree that there are different options for selling the project: a short document (Alberto and Jorge Sánchez-Cabezudo), a one-page flyer (Ramón Campos), or the script of the pilot episode (David Fernández and David Abajo).

In the pre-production and scriptwriting phase, the executive producer hires the scriptwriters who will work under his/her supervision and with the network's directions. At this point, we find different forms and degrees of involvement in the script department. For example, Álex Pina intervenes in the creation of plots and storylines, making the final editing along with producer and scriptwriter Esther Martínez Lobato. Likewise, Javier Olivares oversees the storylines and each version of the script and is in charge of the writing. Juan Carlos Cueto and Rocío Martínez highlight the relevance of having the executive producer write the pilot episode, as it allows them to show the tone and style of the series, becoming a reference for the rest of the team.

At this stage, it is especially important for the executive producer to establish good relations with the network's professionals. Ramón Campos emphasizes the good acceptance of the notes they receive, as he considers that this is “a team effort, from the beginning to the end, and the network is part of that team”. Similarly, Álex Pina says: “I always try to work on the network's notes, to follow them, and when I am against something I look for an alternative third way”. Therefore, “a good relationship with the network is essential, because they have in their hand to stop the shooting and if they don't see the sequence, you also have to understand them”, adds Pilar Nadal¹⁰, executive producer of *Águila Roja* (TVE, 2009-2016).

Concerning shooting, the development of the process shows that not all the scripts are always written in advance and, in the conventional Spanish context, “the budget doesn't allow you to plan everything so that you can always be at the right time”, says Javier Olivares. However, in productions for OTT platforms, it is more likely to have all the texts finalized before shooting, which makes it possible to

10. Pilar Nadal, interviewed by the author, December 1, 2017.

work cinematographically, i.e., on natural sets. This was the case in the production of *La Zona* or *La Peste* (Alberto Rodríguez and Rafael Cobos, Movistar+, 2017).

Regarding the producer's presence on set, Ramón Campos says: "I'm on set for the first two or three weeks to set the camera tone"; afterwards, he exercises this control by viewing the recorded sequences daily. Álex Pina, except for crucial moments, is not usually present on the set, although there is constant communication with the director and meetings beforehand to work on the script. In any case, the executive producer must answer any questions that arise, since "he/she has the vision and has to transmit that idea, because it is very easy for things to go astray, not because of bad intentions, but because everyone can interpret it in a different way", explains Rocío Martínez. In the words of Ramón Campos, "the executive producer must have a creative mind, be clear about the 'picture' he/she wants to achieve and lead the whole team to that 'picture'".

In this context, it is also important to remember the relevance of not redirecting the director, as Javier Olivares points out: "The director has to be in charge on set, and if there is something I don't like, I can tell him/her in private".

In the post-production phase, the producer and director have all the recorded footage and related documents at their disposal, and they work with this material along with the editor, considering the indications made by the network, states David Abajo.

Nevertheless, there are also different degrees of intervention in the editing process. Ramón Campos works actively in post-production, reassembling the material received along with the professional in charge. The Sánchez Cabezudo brothers highlight that special effects work is delegated to an external company and value their performance as a couple: "Jorge was more in editing, and I was more in music, sound, and color grading", adds Alberto. Professionals like Darío Madrona¹¹, executive producer of *Élite* (2018-) along with Carlos Montero, see an increase in the degree of involvement in this phase that, in any case, will depend on the contract signed with the network or platform: "It is true that in the post-production part, I have noticed that I have been working more and more on it, especially in editing".

Lastly, in most cases, professionals state that the promotion, distribution, and commercial exploitation functions are led by the marketing departments of the channel or broadcasting platform.

11. Darío Madrona and Carlos Montero, interviewed by the author, November 28 and December 4, 2017.

The television landscape in Spain

Regarding the current panorama of television in Spain, if we pay attention to the testimonies of the interviewees, we can highlight the positive attitude with which most of them welcome it. Verónica Fernández¹², executive producer of *Hache* (2019-) for Netflix, highlights some advantages, such as more job offers, creative freedoms, and globalization possibilities:

There are projects that were in the pending box that have come to light and are being read. On the other hand, you can propose things that at a certain moment generalist television did not want and that these new platforms dare to do, and then, what I think is the most important, internationalization.

As for the production process, we find a model that promotes the responsibility assigned to the projects' executive producer. This is how Olatz Arroyo¹³, executive producer and creator, along with Marta Sánchez, of *Supernormal* (2021-), puts it: "Movistar wants there to be someone in charge, someone who is clear about the idea and fights for all the teams to work in favor of it. We also focus on the application of international standards for television formats and on the variants in the narrative and aesthetics of the projects". In this regard, the executive producers of *Élite* (2018-) value Netflix's flexibility concerning the duration of the series' chapters.

Finally, we turn to the figures of Ramón Campos and Álex Pina due to the pioneering nature of their executive-creative performance and the powerful international repercussion of their productions thanks to OTT platforms. Ramón Campos was in charge of the first original series of Spanish production of Movistar+ (*Velvet Colección*, 2017-2019) and Netflix (*Las chicas del cable*, 2017-2019). The creator stresses the international goal of his works and the cinematographic style and follows two different thematic lines: romantic melodrama with mystery, and crime thriller, with greater involvement in the latter.

Álex Pina has also worked for both platforms: *El embarcadero* (Movistar+, 2019-2020) and *White Lines* (Netflix, 2020). Highlights include the signing of the exclusive contract between the creator and Netflix (Cascajosa, 2019), and the renewal of *La Casa de Papel*, the platform's most watched non-English-language series and winner of the international Emmy award for best drama in 2018. The evolution of the characters, attractive to the viewer despite being antiheroes, responds to one of the most outstanding and representative factors of Álex Pina's work.

12. Verónica Fernández, interviewed by the author, November 8, 2017.

13. Olatz Arroyo and Marta Sánchez, interviewed by the author, November 7 and October 11, 2017.

In the productions of both showrunners, we can see a visual manufacture, dramatic structure, thematic lines, and reiterative technical team and casting, which derive from their decisions and configure a characteristic, creative, and personal seal in the fiction series of each of these professionals, motivating reflection on their authorial assignment in the industry.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research place us in a complex panorama, which is constantly evolving within the television industry in general and the Spanish media specifically, where the possibilities of digitalization lead to a series of changes in the production and characteristics of fiction series. In this context, the figure of the executive-creative producer experiences a growing prominence.

Although attributing creative responsibilities to this profile in Spain is not a novelty, we note its predominance in production processes, which allows us to link it to the Anglo-Saxon concept of showrunner. Along with the tasks of planning and economic management, the analysis of the functions developed by the executive producer allows us to indicate a significant set of creative responsibilities that he/she performs throughout the different phases of the creation and production process of fiction series.

This professional participates in the emergence and development of the idea from its origin, establishing a series of parameters that configure the format of the audiovisual project. Subsequently, his/her intervention in the script team is evident, through the supervision of the texts, the indications of changes and, especially, the rewriting of the last version. During filming, he/she answers questions and solves problems that arise on the set, where he/she will ideally be present. Finally, the executive producer supervises the editing, either by actively participating in it or by means of notes.

The executive producers interviewed working in the Spanish industry reveal a highly creative profile; the work they carry out on these aspects stands out, especially in the script department, where most of them come from. Thus, they consider themselves to be creative entities, which makes them similar to the prevailing model in the North American industry.

On the other hand, the testimonies show that, despite having the maximum responsibility in this process, the executive producers work within a collaborative environment, where they must ensure the integrity and continuity of the work. It is essential to adapt the contributions made by the different departments to the established parameters, so that the original idea is not distorted and the vision

of the creator(s) is respected. Therefore, teamwork and the relationships within the team are crucial to have a quality product, as well as the indications of the executives of the chain or platform that funds and distributes the project.

In this context, it is essential to consider the implementation of OTT platforms in the Spanish television sector, since they have contributed to the production of novel and attractive content from a formal, thematic, and aesthetic perspective, and have also led to similar changes in generalist channels. The professionals interviewed value these options positively and see a greater attention to their work in the processes of creation and development of these projects.

Finally, insisting on the changing nature of the contemporary television medium, the differences in the mode of production and results of different projects, and the inclusion of new agents in the television industry, we insist on the relevance of complementing this research with future studies.

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