

Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 12



**MICROCINEMAS:
About local culture and its
own agenda**



MICROCINEMAS: ABOUT LOCAL CULTURE AND ITS OWN AGENDA

The microcinemas network of the Chaski Group, born from the efforts of filmmakers with a social vision, has constituted as an alternative route for the exhibition of a cinema that entertains, excites and promotes thinking, facilitating the popular diffusion of contents for a truthful communication. The microcinemas, located in 9 regions of Peru, are gradually becoming a local cultural association that produces community cinema, (re) building cultural identity based on the social reality of their territory. It is a communicational and organizational experience capable of strengthening local identity and culture, counterbalancing globalized media penetration.

From cinematographic caravans to local cinemas

"We traveled throughout the country and showed films every day in three different places", recalls María Elena Benites. She is today the head of the Chaski Group, a team of alternative filmmakers. "In 2004, we decided to replace our cinematographic caravans, which functioned as a circus, by permanent, but also improvised local cinemas, the microcinemas".

Today, there are 36 suburban microcinemas spread across the country. After the idea of local cinemas worked a new one emerged: Forming local microcinema associations where young people are trained in the filmmaking. Each association, made up of 5 or more people, produces annually two short films that reflect the perceptions of the young filmmakers about their environmental and territorial reality, transmitting both, challenging



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themes such as migration, latent socio-environmental conflicts and extractivism, as well as legends and the cultural identity of their people. The process of formation is continuous and obeys a dual logic, between theory and practice. Several of the short films won prizes, the repertoire of the microcinemas network is broad and includes different genres and techniques.

The microcinemas project found positive responses in their local environments and are valid as an alternative route of social exhibition and expression: They allow permanent access to movies and at an affordable cost to the majorities in peripheral areas.

The popular diffusion guarantees the permanence and the economic accessibility of a cinema that has other contents than the ones of Hollywood: an entertaining cinema that also focuses on values of coexistence and the social reality of its public.

Local context as the point of communication: cinema forum

Grupo Chaski is an audiovisual communication initiative. Together with the network of the microcinemas and their filmmaking groups,

the group identifies the thematic orientation of the program every month: human rights, childhood experiences, gender and equality, the environment, etc. The monthly topic is discussed in the form of a forum and a short or a feature film is about the topic is produced. The local company group also seeks contact with organizations, government agencies and initiatives that have something to do with the chosen topic and often organizes an action day together with them.

The idea, in addition to this, is to transform the microcinemas into cultural associations and at the same time microenterprises that achieve their economic sustainability through the exhibition and production of cinema. "Everything





has a value" is heard to say to the members of the Chaski Group and the network, aware that people value things more when they cost. But the microcinemas can not survive only with the revenue of the tickets, which cost 1 to 2 soles (equivalent to 30 - 70 cents), this is why they provide services in the dissemination of information on subjects which do not contradict their philosophy.

Authentic communication

"Lima produces or reproduces the news, and the province repeats them, the entertainment part is discussed in detail, instead of informing about what is happening around the corner", María Elena summarizes this communication dilemma. Media and communication are swimming in the mainstream. The microcinemas network tries to reverse this trend, producing local news and short films. The new main film of Chaski "La última noticia" (Latest News) takes this mainstream media paradox to the core. The cinematic production of the network transforms the people on the street to chroniclers, generating great contributions in the construction of local agendas.

Microcinemas often assume initiatives from cultural centers and break up with media alignment by stimulating local culture and identity and by undertaking different discussions and information actions at the local level, seeking where possible interaction with other initiatives. Each microcinema, begins with the time to define its own identity; some work more about the environment, others, possibly the majority opt for culture, others for more specific social problems such as prevention of violence or drug trafficking. Several microcinemas are in the process of contributing to the construction of local agendas with cultural, social and political content. "There is no ceiling" says María Elena and recalls how they managed to form a micro-cinema in the women's prison. "At the beginning, people are more interested in a break (referring to the snack they offer) and not the contents of an activity... it is a process for people to take the lead of their own life"

Ojo del sabio: Microcinema in the outskirts of Lima

Lis Pérez is a pedagogue and, together with her husband Eddy Ramos, belong to the microphone Ojo del Sabio (Eye of the wise), located



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in Santa Rosa, in the Puente Piedra district in the north of Lima. The couple has been working for several years with children, young people and neighbors of their neighborhood, "dreaming like Don Quixote for a cultural district". Lis and Eddy inaugurate these days their cultural center, financed by a loan they took, to stimulate the culture of their neighborhood. "Santa Rosa, like many other neighborhoods, is a sleeping city," explains Lis. "For our reading courses for girls and boys, cinema is a beautiful thing, since they have no habit of reading, the film as a medium calls much more attention. Short films are the ideal format" explains Lis who coordinates at the same time the local microcinema, where there are always films available for different age groups and particularly children. Grupo Chaski recently started to enable short film formats suitable for people with different abilities as non-viewers.

On a visit to the cultural center Ojo del Sabio (Eye of the wise), groups of children receive their music, artistic gymnastics, dance or reading classes, it is impressive to see how the children get excited with our visit. Marino León is with us today, the main character of the feature film "Gregorio", produced by Grupo Chaski, who achieved a lot of fame by telling the true story of Marino, a boy who migrated from the country to the city of Lima. The curiosity of children in their classes knows no limits and their most frequent question revolves around the question "Where do movies come from?" Everyone wants to make movies. Ojo del Sabio has produced several short films, one of them about the town of Santa Rosa on its anniversary, interviewing the founding people who still live here, another telling the story of Doña Sarena, a neighbor who has turned her garden into an orchard, full with vegetables and fruit trees. The library in the new cultural center already has a name: Quixote and his little mancha. Lis was thrilled during our visit. It's a dream come true for her and Eddy. "Culture is always only for some. We here in Santa Rosa want to change this".

Yuyanapaq - to not forget

In Corona Sta. Rosa, a neighborhood that belongs to the Villa María del Triunfo district in southern Lima, the head of the local microcinema "Yuyanapaq" is Miriam Luna Torreblanca. At first Miriam was part of the public, she then started to get involved and ended up coordinating the small group. She lives with her children and husband in the neighborhood, where the family is building a house where the top floor is planned to be a movie theater. Meanwhile, the microcinema works in an environment provided by an NGO. The short film "Mi Corona" (My Crown) has been awarded many prizes and deals with the phenomenon of rural - urban migration and with everything it implies: it recognizes the neighborhood, its charms and its problems, mainly from the garbage in the street and the pollution caused by emissions from an industrial mega-cement plant.

"Not everyone in the neighborhood agreed with the clear words about the pollution caused by the cement factory when they first saw the



(Source: Grupo Chaski)

Asking Lis what has changed in the last ten years since there is the microcinema in Santa Rosa:

- Our cultural work has become more interactive and has generated leadership in the community.
- Santa Rosa begins to rescue and live its identity and local culture.
- Eye of the Wise has achieved a recognition as culture manager thanks to the microcinemas network.

short film at the microcinema" Miriam comments. It is not very common for many people to identify the emerging agenda for their territory. The dynamics generated from the microcinema in the community are increasingly palpable. At Miriam's house, her 11-year-old daughter Lucero is taking pictures with the camcorder. Between compost, orchard, rabbits and manufactured articles of recycled plastic bags Miriam explains further details of the communal agenda: afforestation of hillsides and recycling of garbage. The entrance to the microcinema costs from 1 to 2 soles or 15 plastic bags.

On the way to the headquarters of the Chaski Group, María Elena is thinking of promoting the idea of audiovisual production about the contamination caused by the burning of treated wood remains and also the potential health risks in the processing of plastic bags.

“Not everyone in the neighborhood agreed with the clear words about the pollution caused by the cement factory when they first saw the short film at the microcinema” Miriam comments”.





Messages to the future

- “Taking the lead of their own lives”- people in the neighborhoods and sleeping cities become managers of the local culture, building social agendas and authentic policies for their territory.
- The microcinemas network, together with Chaski Group, changes the stereotype of news and “canned” communication; instead of news produced in the metropolis and repeated for the periphery and provinces, film producers, chroniclers and managers are emerging, (re) building a cultural identity from their social reality.
- “From Hollywood, show biz and soap operas towards a truthful communication and recognition of the reality” - a new dawn for social, cultural and territorial self-determination.

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