

LEGAL EDUCATION AND CULTURAL EVENTS. THE CLUJEAN-TIFF CASE STUDY

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Motto: *“Democracy is like air: we only truly understand its value when it begins to be lacking.”*
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antifascist politician and, crucially for Italian history, one of the founding fathers of the post-war
Italian Constitution

ABSTRACT

Twenty-five years after its first edition (2001), the Transylvania International Film Festival (TIFF) can no longer be seen exclusively as an event dedicated to cinema. The festival has become part of the identity of the city of Cluj-Napoca and an example of how culture can influence economic life and social relations. We will try to talk about TIFF from an interdisciplinary perspective, located at the intersection of law, economics and cinema. Beyond the financial impact of the festival, we will highlight the role that film can have in developing civic spirit, in strengthening respect for the values of the rule of law and in initiating a legal culture accessible to the general public.

Starting from the constitutional concept of the right to culture and the research direction Law and Film, we suggest that a film festival can become a space for collective reflection on justice, responsibility and social coexistence. At the same time, the economic and symbolic effects that TIFF produces on the host city are analyzed, as well as the challenge of transforming a temporary cultural success into a sustainable resource for the community.

KEYWORDS: *TIFF, right to culture, Law and Film, cultural economy, legal education, social capital, cinema, Cluj-Napoca.*

J.E.L. Classifications: *A20, K10, K19, L82, Z10, Z11, Z13.*

1. INTRODUCTION. WHEN A FESTIVAL BECOME A LEGAL AND SOCIAL FACT

Every June, Cluj-Napoca changes its rhythm. For about ten days, the city's cinemas, squares, courtyards and historical spaces become meeting places for thousands of spectators from the country and abroad. The city seems to function according to other rules: people organize their schedules according to the screenings, conversations continue after midnight around the films they have seen, and public spaces acquire a vitality that few other cultural events manage to generate. However, this transformation raises questions that go beyond the field of cinema. What does the existence of such a festival mean, from a legal and social point of view? To what extent can a cultural event contribute to the effective exercise of the right to culture enshrined in Article 33 of the Romanian Constitution? And, more importantly, can culture influence the way a community understands justice, responsibility and civic life?

An interesting analogy can be made with the Greek institution of Ekecheiria, the sacred truce established during the Olympic Games. In the Hellenic world, the temporary cessation of conflicts had not only a religious but also a legal significance: it created a safe interval in which people from rival cities could circulate, dialogue and participate in a common event.

Of course, the comparison should not be pushed too far. TIFF does not suspend political conflicts, nor does it produce legal effects similar to the ancient truce. However, it creates a framework in which social, professional or generational differences become less important than the shared cultural experience. In the cinema hall, the lawyer sits next to the student, the teacher next to the tourist, and the dialogue that follows the screening is carried out between people who, normally, would not have met.

This capacity to create community explains why major festivals are analyzed today not only by film historians, but also by specialists in public policy, urban economics and cultural law. They contribute to the formation of a social capital that is difficult to measure statistically, but essential for the functioning of a democratic society: mutual trust, openness to dialogue and participation in community life.

From this perspective, TIFF can be seen as a space where culture ceases to be a simple act of consumption and becomes a civic experience. Film does not offer legal solutions, but creates the context in which questions about justice, responsibility or freedom can be discussed in an accessible and humane way.

2. TIFF AND THE ECONOMY OF A COMMUNITY. MORE THAN ENTIRE REVENUE AND STATISTICS

The economic impact of a festival is usually the first argument invoked to justify its financing. The number of tourists, the occupancy rate of hotels, the income generated in the HoReCa sector or the increase in local consumption are important indicators and relatively easy to quantify. In the case of TIFF, all these effects have been consistently documented over the past few years.

However, reducing the phenomenon exclusively to these figures would be insufficient. The economy of a cultural festival also works through less visible mechanisms, but with long-term effects.

A first effect is the reputational one. In the contemporary economy, the image of a city represents a resource in itself. Investors, international students, professionals from the creative industries or tourists increasingly choose communities that offer not only infrastructure, but also an active cultural life. From this perspective, TIFF contributes to strengthening the Cluj brand in a way that few institutional promotion campaigns can match.

The festival also produces an effect of economic trust. During its duration, hundreds of legal relationships develop: sponsorship contracts, transportation services, space rentals, artistic collaborations, commercial activities and partnerships between public institutions and private operators. Beyond their immediate financial value, these relationships consolidate an economic environment based on cooperation and predictability.

There is also a less discussed aspect: festivals contribute to what economists call relational capital. Professional networks are formed around them between artists, entrepreneurs, academics, representatives of the administration and investors. Some collaborations cease with the festival, others generate cultural, educational or economic projects that continue for years.

From a legal perspective, all these interactions assume a complex regulatory framework. Organizing an international festival involves rules regarding the use of public property, the protection of built heritage, the safety of participants, copyright, the sponsorship regime, commercial contracts and cooperation between local authorities and the private sector. TIFF thus becomes a concrete example of how the law creates the necessary conditions for the development of a large-scale cultural activity.

Finally, perhaps the most important economic contribution of the festival is one that is difficult to express in statistical indicators. TIFF generates trust in the city that hosts it. And in an economy

increasingly based on creativity and innovation, trust is one of the most valuable resources of a community.

3. THE RIGHT TO CULTURE: BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTIONAL NORM AND CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

The right to culture is one of those fundamental rights that is frequently talked about in theory, but which is harder to observe in everyday life. Article 33 of the Romanian Constitution guarantees access to culture and obliges the state to support the preservation and development of cultural heritage, but the effectiveness of such a rule cannot be evaluated exclusively by the existence of cultural institutions or by budget allocations.

TIFF provides a suggestive example. During the festival, cinema leaves the traditional space of the cinema hall and occupies public squares, courtyards, gardens or heritage buildings. The film becomes accessible to audiences that do not normally frequent art cinemas. This openness does not only mean the diversification of the cultural offer, but also the democratization of access to culture.

There is also an identity dimension that is worth noting. The linguistic and cultural diversity present in the TIFF selection reflects the values of a democratic society. Films screened in different languages, bilingual subtitling and attention to minority cinema are not mere curatorial choices. They convey the idea that cultural pluralism is not a concession made to some social groups, but a natural expression of the right of each person to participate in cultural life in their own language and according to their own identity. From this perspective, TIFF not only illustrates the existence of the right to culture, but also how it can contribute to the cohesion of a community.

4. FILM AND LAW. WHY CINEMA CAN EDUCATE SURPRISINGLY WELL

In recent decades, some law schools in Europe and the United States have introduced courses called Law and Film. At first glance, the association may seem surprising. Law operates with norms, arguments, and procedures, while cinema belongs to art and imagination.

In reality, the two fields have more in common than one might think.

Both the judicial process and film try to answer the same question: what really happened? The difference is that the court seeks to establish a legal truth, sufficient and binding for the delivery of a judgment, while cinema explores human truth, with its contradictions and ambiguities.

This proximity explains the growing interest in the use of film in legal education. A textbook can very well explain the institution of the presumption of innocence or the rules of evidence administration. A film tries to show the human consequences of these principles.

The judge does not resolve abstract cases, but conflicts that affect individual destinies. The lawyer does not only defend legal interests, but people in a situation of vulnerability. The prosecutor does not exclusively pursue the application of the law, but also the protection of the public interest. These dimensions are difficult to capture in a university course, but become evident in a well-constructed cinematic narrative.

Great films about justice do not offer simple answers. They avoid dividing characters into heroes and absolute culprits and force the viewer to accept the existence of uncertainty. And this acceptance is one of the most important qualities of a good lawyer.

In the practice of law, there are rarely perfect solutions. There are competing arguments, incomplete evidence and situations in which the law must be interpreted with caution. The auteur film familiarizes the audience with precisely this complexity. It does not transform the viewer into a legal expert, but it helps him understand that the act of justice is more difficult than it seems from the outside. For this reason, cinema can become a genuine tool of informal legal education.

5. CAN A FILM FESTIVAL CHANGE PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAW?

The question seems ambitious, but the literature on legal psychology offers a nuanced answer.

Compliance with the law does not depend solely on the existence of sanctions. A society functions stably when most people comply with the rules because they consider them legitimate and useful, not just out of fear of punishment. Organized programs/activities have a direct, quantifiable impact on the quality of life and well-being of the community. (Maniu A Tom Tyler observed that trust in institutions and the perception of the fairness of procedures decisively influence voluntary compliance with the norm.

In this context, film can have a more important role than it seems at first glance. A viewer who watches an intelligently constructed film is invited to look at the same situation from different perspectives. See the cinematic masterpiece *"12 Angry Men"*. In a few minutes, he can come to understand the arguments of the victim, the defendant, the lawyer and the judge. This exercise of continuous change of perspective develops empathy and reduces the temptation of hasty judgments.

Many of the films awarded at major international festivals do not offer a comfortable ending. They leave the viewer with questions, not with certainties. It is precisely this intellectual unrest that stimulates moral reflection.

In fact, the law itself operates in a similar logic. A court decision A solid decision is not the result of an instinctive reaction, but of a process of deliberation. The judge weighs arguments, evaluates evidence and tries to construct the fairest possible solution within the limits of the law. Seen in this way, the film becomes an exercise in deliberation. It does not tell the viewer what to believe, but forces him to reflect before formulating a conclusion. It is, perhaps, one of the most valuable contributions that cinema can make to a democratic society.

6. FILMS THAT CULTIVATE DISCERNMENT AND THOSE THAT NORMALIZE VIOLENCE

Not every film produces the same effect on the audience. Cinema, like literature, educates not only through its subject matter, but also through the way it constructs its characters, conflicts, and solutions. From this perspective, a festival like TIFF has a responsibility that goes beyond artistic selection: that of proposing films capable of stimulating reflection, not just the rapid consumption of images.

This observation is all the more important in the case of young audiences. Adolescence and the beginning of adult life are periods in which not only cultural tastes are formed, but also the relationship to authority, justice, and responsibility. Film can influence these processes in a subtle way, sometimes more effectively than didactic discourse or a civic education textbook.

The relevant criterion is not whether a film talks about judges or lawyers, but whether it teaches the viewer to think before judging.

6.1. Films that develop legal culture and civic spirit

Some films manage to transform the cinema into a space for reflection on justice. They do not offer easy answers nor do they divide the world into completely good or completely bad characters. It is precisely this complexity that gives them educational value.

Two Men in the City: The French classic with Alain Delon, Jean Gabin and Gerard Depardieu that had such a great impact on the public that legend has it that, the very next year, the death penalty was abolished in France. Unjustly forgotten and unstudied. It should be mandatory seen in police

schools to debate how the different human attitudes of some police officers can save or destroy a man.

12 Angry Men (Sidney Lumet): The power of rational argument and the moral obligation to listen before deciding. Although the action does not take place in a classroom, this classic is, in essence, the purest lesson in applied legal education that a future lawyer can receive. 12 jurors who must decide the fate of a young man demonstrate how personal prejudices can distort justice and how difficult it is to maintain a “reasonable doubt” in the face of a hostile majority. The film educates the viewer in the spirit of legal rigor, showing that law does not mean absolute certainties, but critical analysis of each piece of evidence and the enormous responsibility of not convicting an innocent person. It is the film that should be shown to every generation of law students.

Anatomy of a Collapse (Justine Triet): Few recent films illustrate so well the difference between factual truth and judicial truth. The trial presented in the film does not only aim to identify a guilty person, but highlights the difficulty with which the court reconstructs reality when the evidence is incomplete or interpretable. For a law student, the film is a lesson in the presumption of innocence and the limits that any judicial system must accept in its search for truth.

The Tribunal (Chaitanya Tamhane): The Indian film avoids spectacular dramatization and presents justice as it is in many legal systems: slow, bureaucratic and sometimes overwhelmed by its own procedures. The merit of the film lies in the fact that it forces the viewer to understand that justice does not depend only on the existence of good laws, but also on the way in which they are applied.

Collective (Alexander Nanau) More than a documentary about the tragedy at Colectiv, the film is a reflection on the responsibility of public institutions. It demonstrates that the violation of apparently technical administrative norms can have dramatic consequences on the right to life and on citizens' trust in the state. For future lawyers, economists or civil servants, the film is a lesson in the importance of transparency and administrative responsibility.

The Life of Others (*Das Leben der Anderen*) The film shows how law loses its meaning when state institutions become instruments of surveillance and repression. For young people who have not experienced totalitarian regimes, this film explains better than many constitutional law treatises why the independence of the judiciary and the protection of privacy are not mere theoretical concepts.

To Kill a Mockingbird The character of Atticus Finch continues to be one of the most powerful professional role models for any lawyer. The film does not glorify the legal profession, but rather

reminds us that the true measure of a lawyer is not media success, but the willingness to defend the principles of the rule of law even when public opinion is hostile to him.

The Paper Chase (James Bridges) *The Paper Chase* is considered the absolute standard in cinema when it comes to surviving law school and its impact on the human mind. The film follows a first-year Harvard student and his extremely tense relationship with the legendary Professor Kingsfield, a titan of contract law who uses the Socratic method to terrorize and motivate his students. It is a brilliant analysis of how a legal education radically changes the way you think, isolate facts, and put emotions aside in the face of the law.

The Legacy (Francis Ford Coppola) Based on a novel by John Grisham (*The Rainmaker*), the film offers a brutally realistic perspective on the transition from the university benches directly to the jungle of the courts. A young law graduate, completely unprepared for the cynicism of the system, ends up taking on a huge fraud case against a corrupt insurance company. The film is an excellent lesson in professional ethics, the limits of student idealism and the importance of resilience when you are a simple rookie fighting armies of corporate lawyers.

Why Me? (Tudor Giurgiu) Film based on the true, deeply tragic case of the young prosecutor Cristian Panait. The story follows a brilliant and idealistic magistrate who strongly believes in truth and justice, but who receives a high-level corruption case involving secret services and politicians. It is perhaps the most powerful and brutal lesson about the collision between the idealism taught in college and the reality of the backstage games of a deeply flawed system.

Why are these films important? They all have one thing in common. They do not teach the viewer what to believe, but how to think. They cultivate the patience of argument, respect for evidence, empathy, and the acceptance that people and legal conflicts are almost always more complex than they appear at first glance. These skills are useful not only for a lawyer, but for any citizen of a democratic society.

6.2. What kinds of films should be viewed critically?

To say that certain films should be banned would be incompatible with the freedom of artistic creation and freedom of expression. The diversity of cinematic expressions represents a value in itself. However, one thing is the freedom to create and another is the educational value that we attribute to a work.

From the perspective of the civic education of young people, certain types of productions deserve critical discussion.

First, there are films in which violence becomes the main form of conflict resolution. The main character acts outside the law, does his own justice, and his success is presented as the moral justification for violating the norms. Such narratives cultivate the idea that efficiency is more important than legality and that state institutions are useless.

This type of message may be cinematically attractive, but it is problematic from the perspective of legal education.

Secondly, it is worth looking with caution at films that transform crime into a form of social prestige. Some productions build charismatic characters around the mafia, corruption or drug trafficking, without insisting enough on the moral and human costs of these choices. The risk lies not in the existence of these characters, but in their romanticization.

Last but not least, the culture of internet algorithms increasingly favors the consumption of very fast-paced productions, based on continuous action and immediate emotional rewards. These films can be excellent as entertainment, but when they become the only form of contact with cinema, they reduce the viewer's availability for reflection and dialogue.

The problem is not the existence of blockbusters, but the absence of alternatives.

This is precisely where a festival like TIFF comes into play. It does not compete with commercial cinema, but complements it, proposing films that demand patience, attention and the willingness to accept the complexity of the world.

In an era where social networks encourage immediate reactions and categorical judgments, perhaps one of the most important lessons that auteur cinema offers young people is that almost no human conflict can be reduced to a response of a few seconds.

7. AFTER THE FESTIVAL. HOW CAN CULTURAL EFFRENCIA BECOME A SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC POLICY?

One of the most interesting challenges that TIFF raises is not the organization of the festival itself, but what happens after it ends.

Every year, for about ten days, the cinemas are full, the debates continue until late at night, and the public spaces become lively places of meeting and dialogue. Cluj seems to be rediscovering the pleasure of cultural conversation. However, after the last guests have left and the last screen in Union Square has turned off, the city gradually returns to its usual rhythm.

This contrast raises a legitimate question: can a festival, no matter how successful, sustainably change the cultural habits of a community?

The answer is probably no.

But it can create the conditions for this change.

There is a simple principle in economics: investments produce long-term effects only if they are followed by coherent policies. The same is true in the field of culture. A festival can generate enthusiasm, visibility and participation, but it cannot replace permanent cultural infrastructure. Therefore, the success of TIFFF should be seen not as a point of arrival, but as an argument for the development of more ambitious public policies.

On the one hand, art cinemas must be seen as institutions of public interest, not just as commercial spaces. They can become permanent places of cultural education, debate and civic formation.

Secondly, the collaboration between universities and festivals could be expanded. Law, Economics, Political Science or Sociology faculties have in cinema an insufficiently exploited teaching tool. A film followed by an interdisciplinary debate can sometimes produce a deeper understanding than an exclusively theoretical lecture.

After all, respect for the law does not begin in the courtroom. It begins in the family, in school and in cultural spaces where people learn to listen to the arguments of others before formulating their own verdict.

CONCLUSIONS

After a quarter of a century of existence, the Transylvania International Film Festival can no longer be understood exclusively by the number of spectators, the value of sponsorships or the prestige of its guests. All of these are important, but they do not fully explain the place that TIFFF occupies today in the life of the city and in the Romanian cultural landscape.

Seen from a legal perspective, the festival represents a convincing example of how a fundamental right – the right to culture – can become a concrete, accessible and participatory experience. From an economic perspective, it demonstrates that investing in culture produces effects that go beyond the income generated during the event and contributes to the reputation, attractiveness and competitiveness of a city (Maniu, D. A., Maniu, E. A., Mihaly, B., 2019). From an educational perspective, TIFFF offers something that a classroom can hardly reproduce in its entirety: the direct

encounter with stories that force the viewer to ask questions about justice, responsibility and the human condition.

This is precisely where law and cinema meet.

Both seek to understand human behavior. Both seek the truth, even if they use different tools. The court issues rulings; the film provokes reflections. The court establishes legal consequences; based on meticulous, scientific research, cinema cultivates the inner willingness to understand why the law exists and why respecting it represents, above all, a moral and civic choice.

In a society where information circulates at an unprecedented speed, and opinions are often formed before facts, legal education can no longer remain exclusively between the covers of textbooks. It needs languages capable of speaking to both emotion and reason. Film can be one of these languages. It is, but often the greatest impact is from films that we do not want as educators.

Perhaps the true achievement of TIFF does not lie in the number of films screened or the awards given, but in the fact that, year after year, it manages to gather people who think differently in the same room and to make them, at least for two hours, watch the same story with the same attention. In an era marked by polarization and increasingly difficult dialogue, this is not only a cultural achievement, but also a profoundly civic one.

Instead of an epilogue:

We repeat **Piero Calamandra's** words from the motto, in his historic Speech on the Constitution of 1955, democracy is like air: we only feel its value when it begins to be lacking. The same could be said about culture. We feel this in all social spheres, from car traffic to the quality of Romanian politicians.

We rarely notice how much a film festival contributes to the health of a community. It does not appear in the statistics on the gross domestic product, it cannot be measured in the number of contracts concluded, and it does not produce legal effects.

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