

Title: Regional screen ecosystems at the peripheries: Production and talent development in Tromsø and Aarhus

Authors: Pei-Sze Chow and Stine Agnete Sand

Contact information

Corresponding author:

Pei-Sze Chow

Department of Media Studies

Aarhus University

Helsingforsgade 14,

8200 Aarhus, Denmark

Phone: +45 9352 1312

E-mail: pschow@cc.au.dk

Stine Agnete Sand

Department of Tourism and Northern Studies

University of Tromsø

Follums vei, 9509 Alta, Norway

Phone: +47 92649034

E-mail: stine.sand@uit.no

Abstract:

This article addresses the regionalization of screen culture in Norway and Denmark, focusing on how regional screen entities in Tromsø and Aarhus are working to professionalize production and talent development at the peripheries of both countries. We outline their distinctive characteristics and circumstances as regional hubs and delineate the key actors that constitute the respective screen ecosystems. We focus on the interplay between regional film policy, production and talent development in relation to regional development, geography, creativity, innovation and the economy of culture. Based on an examination of policies,

strategy documents and interviews conducted with practitioners in Aarhus and Tromsø over the period 2014–2019, we explore the diverse strategies these regional production hubs employ to develop and—more challengingly—retain talents in the region, arguing that despite the increased attention given to ‘diversity’ in film policy, structural and cultural obstacles hamper sustainable growth.

Contributors details

Pei-Sze Chow is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Department of Media and Journalism at Aarhus University researching the regional screen ecosystem of Aarhus and West Denmark. Forthcoming publications include a book on transnational screen culture in the Øresund region and the edited volume, *A History of Danish Cinema* (with C. Claire Thomson and Isak Thorsen).

Stine Agnete Sand works as an associate professor at the Department of Tourism and Northern Studies at the University of Tromsø, the Arctic University of Norway, researching regional film, journalism and indigenous media, and as an associate professor at the MA programme in Indigenous Journalism, Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Kautokeino.

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The impetus for this article comes from the increasing political and cultural interest in developing regional film and television production in Europe. Research on regional film production in Norway, for instance, shows that regional companies act within local, national and global frames, including production strategies that promote ‘universal’ themes but with a place-specific or culturally specific touch (Sand 2019: 22). It is also argued that regional film production contributes to varied representations of places and people (Bjerkeland 2018). Furthermore, recent calls for ‘diversity’ in national film policy are leading to more resources being channelled into regional film funds and initiatives aimed at fostering regional talent development and capacity building, particularly in peripheral regions. Across Europe, regional screen entities employ diverse strategies to develop a thriving screen milieu and foster growth at the margins of their respective countries — now the focus of a growing area of research.

Although film production in the peripheries is receiving more scholarly and state interest, research that examines the conditions in specific regions in Scandinavia remains scarce, especially work comparing regional screen ecosystems (cf. Sand 2017, Hedling 2010). This article is an empirical contribution to Nordic production studies, especially where it addresses and compares production and talent development specifically at the margins of Denmark and Norway. Through our case studies we aim to provide regionally specific perspectives on the question of how film regions located in the national periphery navigate the contemporary screen production landscape in relation to national and transnational interconnections.

Interest in the creative industries has grown considerably in recent years, including increased emphasis on regional development, creativity, innovation and the economics of culture (Sand forthcoming). The concept of the creative industries has had a major impact on European cultural policy, including a focus on how culture can foster economic development in smaller regions that have either experienced de-industrialization and a lack of work opportunities, or are repositioning and transforming their cultural economies *vis-à-vis* the cultural-political dominance of the respective national capitals. Regional production hubs and clusters are important here because of the assumption that geographical proximity on a local scale is crucial, highlighting the necessity of having interconnected companies, skills, knowledge and institutions in a particular region (Porter 2000: 16).

This article presents two portraits of how regional screen agencies in Tromsø in Norway and Aarhus in Denmark are working to professionalize production and talent development at the margins of both countries. As David Hesmondhalgh notes, the cultural

industries have become highly significant in local and regional urban and social policy ‘as a means of regenerating economies and providing competitive advantage over other cities and regions’ (2013: 2), with audiovisual media production forming a significant part of this sector. Accordingly, we address the cultural and economic role of film and television in regional creative media industries and outline the distinctive characteristics and circumstances of Tromsø and Aarhus as regional production hubs, delineating the key actors that constitute the respective screen ecosystems. We analyse the interplay between regional film policy, production and talent development in the two city regions in relation to regional development, geography, innovation and the economics of culture. Based on a qualitative analysis of policies, reports and interviews conducted with practitioners and emerging talent in Tromsø and Aarhus over the period 2014–2019, the article explores the particular strategies that these regional production hubs employ not only to develop and — more challengingly — retain talents in the region, but also to increase production volume. While the obvious strategy of the state investing even more money in regional production may go some way towards boosting production capacities, based on our case studies we argue that two factors matter more in positively impacting the longer-term sustainability of a regional production hub: having a diversified and international outlook, and taking into account the shifting cultural attitudes of practitioners and policymakers.

The question of how to retain film talents in the regions is a crucial regional and film-political issue. De-industrialization and an increased interest in culture as a driver of regional economic development has led to what can be described as the regionalization of film and screen-based media. The number of regional film funds in Europe is increasing (Newman-Baudais 2011: 109), and in Sweden, for instance, most film productions already take place outside the capital Stockholm (Dahlström and Hermelin 2007: 111). This trend is not a uniquely new phenomenon, yet regional entities such as film funds, production hubs and clusters, film schools, workshops and training initiatives still face many challenges. On the one hand, there are issues of capacity building, attracting and retaining talent and maintaining or boosting production volume. Competition with the capital city where screen activity is traditionally anchored and with other regional film funds within the same national territory are also complications. On the other hand, operating on a smaller, sub-national scale may allow for innovation and thinking in new directions and contribute to advantages such as social capital and local support, access to diverse stories and often spectacular natural landscapes that practitioners in the capital do not have (Sand 2019: 18-20). There is also a general consensus that regional screen companies in various ways contribute to the ‘cultural

health, commercial diversity, and international profile' of the cities/regions to which they belong (Spicer and Presence 2017: 4). Nevertheless, how can regional screen milieus foster a sustainable path forward? What are the factors that push people out of the region and what strategies have there been to create and sustain a local talent pool? These are some of the overarching questions we ask when examining how screen production can survive and thrive in the peripheries.

Tromsø and Aarhus in a Scandinavian film context

Within Scandinavia, Film i Väst, the regional film fund located in Trollhättan in west Sweden, has received much attention and is frequently held up as a model of regional film support, both because it has succeeded in attracting several big productions to the area and because of the generous financial support it receives from its region, Västra Götaland. Financially, Film i Väst is one of the biggest regional film funds in Europe with an income of SEK 114.9 million in 2018 (Film i Väst 2018). Norway and Denmark have no regional film agencies with the same level of resources. Tromsø and Aarhus are the hometowns of the oldest regional screen agencies in the respective countries, namely Nordnorsk Filmsenter (Northern Norway Film Centre, hereafter NNFS, established in 1979) and the Den Vestdanske Filmpulje (the West Danish Film Fund, hereafter DVF, established in 1997 and formerly known as Den Østjyske Filmfond [the East Jutland Film Fund]). They are also similar because of their peripheral status, located far from the respective film capitals, Oslo and Copenhagen, and thus face similar challenges. Yet the two regions differ in their efforts to distinguish themselves from the dominant screen milieus in the capitals in terms of approach, initiatives and (regional) policy considerations.¹ It is therefore relevant to compare the differences and similarities of Tromsø and Aarhus when addressing the opportunities and challenges of supporting a peripheral, regional screen milieu.

In Norway, there are now nine regional film agencies funded by the state and by local municipalities and counties, three funds that are mostly economically motivated and six centres that are culturally oriented, aiming to build and develop local talents. In addition, the International Sámi Film Institute promotes Sámi filmmakers. In the Danish film landscape, the two regional film funds, the West Danish Film Fund and FilmFyn (based in Funen), play important roles in contributing to the diversity of cinematic output across the country as well as fostering economic development in areas outside the capital. They are funded primarily by their member municipalities and also receive separate funding from the Danish state. A third

and short-lived fund, the Copenhagen Film Fund (2013–2019), concentrated on supporting projects within the capital region.

Regional film agencies are important for the existence of regional film production, especially because of funding opportunities, their networks and their role as facilitators for the local industry. They are typically funded by member municipalities and in some cases, the national film institutes in accordance with state cultural policy. Regional film policy is a hybrid phenomenon, based on a district-level political argument that people should be able to work in the film sector not only in the capital area. One common rationale for the work of regional screen agencies is that they foster diversity in national film cultures — a cultural argument — by increasing quality and variety in stories and the professionalism of film workers. A second argument is that they contribute to regional development and growth — an economic argument that derives from creative industries discourses that have had a major impact on European film policy (see for instance Sand forthcoming, and Newsinger 2010: 106ff. for discussions on film policy and the creative industries). Regional film agencies increase the income to the business sector as a whole since the regions finance the film agencies together with public funding from the government. The latter rationale has become dominant in the policy discourse surrounding the funding of regional film agencies, in several cases even eclipsing the cultural rationale (Hjort and Petrie 2007: 16), and it has become important for regional administrators to demonstrate to government and private investors ‘that film is an investment that brings tangible rewards in terms of jobs and GDP, rather than a spending burden’ (Gubbins 2016: 25).

From the perspective of screen labour and talent development, discussions about the (geographical) diversity of screen production certainly relate closely to issues of cultural and linguistic representation, mobility and access to work opportunities. For many screen practitioners either starting out on their careers or trying to establish themselves in the regions, it is difficult to ignore the seduction of the capital city and its often more dynamic and plentiful opportunities. After all, decades of production experience have resulted in a dense concentration of companies, individuals, projects and expertise in such film capitals. This has implications for the long-term sustainability of screen production not only at the regional level, but also at the national level wherein film production becomes capital-centric in many ways.

Tromsø as a film cluster

Tromsø is the largest city in northern Norway, with 77,000 inhabitants. Northern Norway, comprised of two counties, Troms/Finnmark (Troms and Finnmark were two separate counties until 2020), and Nordland, is in turn the largest film region in the country, geographically speaking, and the oldest film region after Oslo (Ryssevik and Dahle 2015: 9). Tromsø is undoubtedly the film capital in the northern region, the only area that can be described as a film cluster (Ryssevik and Dahle 2015: 11). According to Statistisk sentralbyrå (Statistics Norway), Tromsø had 112 businesses dedicated to film, video and television production in 2019 (SSB 2019), a figure that also includes music and sound production. Tromsø is where most of the film practitioners in northern Norway are located, and most of the funding from the regional film centre NNFS goes to practitioners in the Tromsø area (NNFS 2018b). According to the CEO of NNFS, Tor Vadseth, the number of companies in the Troms area has increased considerably in the last five years and professionalization is well underway, especially in Tromsø (Vadseth 2019: n.pag.).

NNFS, located in Tromsø and established in 1979, is the oldest regional film centre in Norway. Today it has three employees. The two northernmost counties and Tromsø municipality own the centre. The total spent on production, development, young talents and competence building was NOK 11.7 million in 2018; the centre contributed to the funding of 20 feature films that premiered that year as well as to the development and production of 49 documentaries and short films (NNFS 2018b). NNFS is vital to the very existence of a film industry in the North and is highly regarded by regional film practitioners, who believe it plays an important role in their work (Ryssevik and Dahle 2015: 73). A main goal, specified by the film policy and funding practices of the Norwegian state, is to contribute to the development of professional film workers and the northern Norwegian film industry as a whole (Norwegian Ministry of Culture 2015: 72). To this end, the centre facilitates networking by organizing meetings and workshops and offering travel grants for filmmakers. To encourage young talents, NNFS cooperates with Tvibit, a competence centre in Tromsø where young people can develop their interest in film. NNFS is especially focused on improving production standards, management, talent acquisition, distribution and audience development (NNFS 2019).

The regional film fund Filmfond Nord (Film Fund North, hereafter FFN), with two employees, is based in the city of Bodø but also has an office in Tromsø. FFN also covers the two northernmost counties with the goal of increasing the number of regional productions

and contributing to the development of the film sector by creating more film-related work opportunities. The fund offers top financing for feature films and TV series and allocates approximately NOK 11 million annually (Filmfond Nord 2019). In comparison, the national film fund, the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI), received NOK 520 million in 2020. Both NNFS and FFN are financed by municipalities, counties and the state, but their goals are to a certain degree different, as NNFS's work is based on non-commercial strategies aimed to build, develop and promote the film sector, while FFN has a more commercial focus. However, both collaborate on various projects with the International Sámi Film Institute (ISFI) in Kautokeino, which aims to develop, support and co-produce Sámi film and television production in the Sámi language.

Filmverftet (Film Yard), a small film cluster that comprises 20 companies in Tromsø, aims to be a catalyst for the film sector in the northern region. According to its website, Film Yard wants to make the companies visible, share ideas, buy services from each other and develop projects together, aiming to professionalize and increase competence building. Film Yard promotes network building and sharing to strengthen the film sector as a whole rather than competition among companies. In 2017, Film Yard initiated Filmklynge Nord (Film Cluster North), inspired by the cluster concept and cluster thinking (Porter 2000: 16-17). Film Cluster North consists of 48 companies from northern Norway, not only Tromsø. It focuses on networking, competence/quality, distribution and innovation in order to strengthen the financial underpinnings of the industry and eventually increase the number of film narratives from northern Norway (Filmklynge Nord 2018). Innovation Norway, a state-owned company that aims to improve innovation and development of Norwegian enterprises and industry, finances Film Cluster North.

Another player, the regional resource and infrastructure company FilmCamp, located about an hour's drive from Tromsø, has a film studio and caters to the needs and demands of the market for feature film and TV productions. The University of Tromsø offers professional training through a media production studies programme, while Tvibit has courses for those aged 15 to 30. With regard to outreach, the biggest film festival in Norway, the Tromsø International Film Festival (TIFF), not only highlights the city's profile as a film hub, but also plays an important role for the regional film industry, since many local filmmakers have premiered their work here.

The development in Tromsø shows that cluster thinking, social capital and the economy of culture are becoming increasingly important. The film sector here is small and competent key personnel are not always available, sometimes necessitating the use of

practitioners from Oslo. To increase competencies and create work opportunities, a certain level of trust, cooperation and social capital are necessary. In the long run, collaborating actively with the local community contributes positively to the entire film sector in the area, including improving its economy and sustainability.

Regional film policy in Norway

Film policy in Norway was, until recently, strongly centralized. Regional film agencies were originally initiated by the regions themselves through private investors and local authorities. The goal was to boost the regions by increasing employment and location promotion. The first regional fund in Norway, Film3, was established in Lillehammer in 2001, inspired by the success of Film i Väst in Sweden. The government included the regions in their film policy in 2007, indicating a shift from a culture-oriented policy to a business and district-oriented policy. This latter turn can be described as instrumentalism, measuring the economic impact of culture (Gray 2007: 204). According to the 2007 policy, the regions would contribute to diverse stories and film production throughout the country, but also bring money to the film industry as a whole since municipalities and counties take part in financing the regional film centres and funds (Norwegian Ministry of Culture 2007: 94).

In an evaluation of the regional film funds in Norway, Jostein Ryssevik and Turid Vaage concluded that they had succeeded in bringing more income to the Norwegian film industry, but Oslo's function and status as the film industry's main hub was unchanged. To create stronger, regional film clusters, the report argued in favour of reducing the number of funds, including increased state funding to strengthen these funds (Ryssevik and Vaage 2011: 105). Both the report and the latest film policy of 2015 underline the importance of sustainability and economic results in the regions (Norwegian Ministry of Culture 2015). This emphasis on the business aspect of filmmaking is not just a Norwegian tendency; a Danish report from 2011 about Scandinavian film and television culture concluded that the industries in all three countries are fragmented and it is necessary to establish strong creative clusters that succeed transnationally (Bondebjerg and Redvall 2011: 10).

The regions have not experienced a fundamental change in commitment with regard to the actual funding from the state, although it has increased since 2015. In 2019, NFI received NOK 520.1 million, while the regional film agencies and funds received a total of NOK 80.3 million (NFI 2019). On its webpage, NNFS described the budget proposal as 'depressing' and asserted that the so-called commitment to regional film was 'fake' (NNFS 2018a). The new policy of 2015 has also resulted in a shift in the allocation of funding to the

regional film agencies from a more equally allocated model to a result-oriented model. In January 2019 a film seminar in Bergen highlighted ongoing discussion on the amount of public funding as well as on how state funding should be divided among the regions. At one point, one of the regional film agencies was expelled from FilmReg (an umbrella organization for all the regional film agencies in Norway), accused of not acting in solidarity with other agencies by contacting the government on its own (Rushprint 2018). In sum, since the amount of regional funding is small, there is a danger that the regions increasingly see each other as competitors instead of following FilmReg guidelines to work together politically to strengthen regional film. In addition to the skewed allocation of funding between the regions and NFI, more than 80 per cent of the funding from NFI goes to companies in the Oslo area (Sand 2017: 5). Film policy and the allocation of state money are important since many companies depend upon public funding. It is therefore not surprising that many talents from Tromsø follow the money and move to Oslo.

Current situation and challenges

Tromsø has many documentary and short-film producers (both companies and freelancers); northern Norway has the largest concentration of documentary filmmakers outside the capital (Ryssevik and Dahle 2015: 9). A recent trend that is also seen in the west Danish context is that more regional practitioners are focusing on new media, especially augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) and games (NNFS 2018b). However, production of long formats such as television series and feature films is almost non-existent even though these have been a goal of the local film industry for many years. After a ten-year effort, the oldest company in Tromsø, Original Film, did finally succeed in producing its first full-length feature in 2017.

In 2015, the report *Større enn kval? - en utredning om den nordnorske filmbransjen* (Bigger than a whale? Mapping the film business in northern Norway), initiated by Innovation Norway to uncover development potential and challenges, identified around 200 film workers and 150 companies in the region, with only nine companies having more than two employees (Ryssevik and Dahle 2015: 11). The region thus lacks strong companies that can employ many film workers and contribute to working opportunities for others, a problem exacerbated by great geographical spread. The report also reveals that the wage level among film workers in northern Norway is low and that economic growth is the lowest per employee in the Norwegian film industry. Another challenge is the limited market for making money on commercials and corporate film production (Ryssevik and Dahle 2015: 42). Four years after the report, Tor Vadseth at NNFS stated that the greatest challenges concern the lack of

large productions that can employ many people for a long period and the fact that many talents move away from the area (Vadseth 2019: n.pag.). Evidently, these obstacles are connected.

On the positive side, the film industry has access to regional, private funding from Samfunnsløftet (Society lift), a funding scheme aiming at boosting the northern part of Norway, supported by the local bank Sparebank1 Nord-Norge, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and, of course, the regional film agencies. According to Vadseth, funding applications have revealed an increased professionalization in the regional film sector. Other positive findings include good recruitment practices, the youth and enthusiasm of film workers and strong support from local and regional authorities (Ryssevik and Dahle 2015: 47). According to Geir Stokke, project leader at Film Cluster North, a generational shift is now taking place; younger film workers are more open and interested in collaboration rather than seeing each other as competitors (Stokke 2019: n.pag.). However, at a film and tourism conference in Tromsø in May 2019, several local filmmakers identified a problem: since NFI is reluctant to support a project if key personnel lack long track records, they must use highly experienced professionals from the capital instead of talented film workers with less experience from their own area. The regional film centres continuously work to develop talented local film workers but often experience brain drain; up-and-coming talents move away when they achieve a certain level of experience because they do not have enough work opportunities locally (Vadseth 2019: n.pag.). A clear recommendation in the 2015 report is the need for network-building and clustering to attract external projects to the area, especially large projects (feature films, television series) to increase the production volume and retain talent (Ryssevik and Dahle 2015: 50).

Strategies for strengthening the film sector in northern Norway

A regional centralization process has taken place and there are now three regional film funds in Norway instead of six including Film Fund North. The government wanted fewer but stronger clusters so the film sector would benefit from having a number of related companies within the same geographic area. A long-awaited film incentive arrangement was introduced in 2016 to attract foreign producers. The incentive scheme grants a rebate of up to 25 per cent on costs spent in Norway on productions intended for international distribution (NFI 2020). A newly established film commission for northern Norway will work to draw more productions to the region.

In 2020, NNFS initiated a pilot project called Storm fra Nord (Storm from the North) together with Film Fund North, FilmCamp, the International Sámi Film Institute and Tivbit, where local producers can apply for funding for a feature film or television series. The goal is to increase the production volume and continuous development of low-budget productions in northern Norway, but also to promote projects with a strong local anchoring that reach a broad audience (Vadseth 2019: n.pag.). However, the initiators secure only NOK 5 million in investment, a small amount of capital for film production. In comparison, it is possible to apply for NOK 15 million at the NFI for the production of a feature film. In addition to initiatives aimed at fiction films and television series, NNFS also initiated North Pitch, a financing forum for documentary productions focusing on life in the Polar region. Hosted by the Tromsø International Film Festival, the forum allows filmmakers to present their projects to foreign investors to secure funding for the selected films. North Pitch is an example of how NNFS works to improve, internationalize and professionalize the film sector.

A recent initiative is Film Cluster North, based in Tromsø, which focuses on film as business. The strategy of 2019 has been to develop tools for marketing, sales and distribution of films from northern Norway, including a Verktøykasse for distribusjon (Toolbox for distribution) to promote film circulation (Stokke 2019: n.pag.). A second goal is to increase collaboration between tourism and film. In Tromsø the tourist industry is booming and many film companies are now trying to get their slice of the tourism pie. The cluster is involved, for instance, in a project where the goal is to create film tourism based on a film about the battle of Narvik during World War II. In addition it collaborates with the School of Business and Economics at the University of Tromsø to develop projects that will benefit the sector. According to Geir Stokke, 'We want the researchers to do research for us, not just about us' (Stokke 2019: n.pag.). Film Cluster North's slogan is 'Flere fortellinger fra nord' (More stories from the North) (Filmklynge Nord 2018), and Stokke hopes that researchers will contribute to making this happen.

Such support for production and talent development in northern Norway and promotion of the visibility of the regional film industry are themes that echo the west Danish experience, especially since these elements are crucial to building a sustainable foundation for regional film milieus. Exploring inter-sectoral opportunities such as film tourism is also an avenue that organizations in Aarhus have pursued—most notably with the crime television series *Dicte* (2013–2016), which was filmed in key locations around the city. Yet, as will become clear in the next section, extant conditions relating to state funding and regional

attitudes to internal and external collaboration produce differing nuances in the way regions respond to economic and cultural challenges in film production at the peripheries.

Aarhus as a film cluster

Aarhus is Denmark's second-largest city, located on the east coast of the Jutland peninsula, roughly three hours from Copenhagen by train or car. It is a dense urban area with a municipal population of ca. 340,000. According to a 2017 report on the creative industries in central Jutland, the so-called 'digital visual industry' (DVI) sector—which includes film, television, computer games, animation, design and advertising, amongst other media—employs 10,785 in full-time jobs as of 2015, making up 41 per cent of the creative industries in the region (More Creative 2017: 6). A separate report from 2018 notes that there are 225 companies and 3,733 employees in the screen industry in central and north Denmark, producing a turnover of around EUR 3 billion (Sturm and Grosch 2018: 2–3).

Located at Sydhavnen (South Harbour) in Aarhus, an area undergoing significant development from an industrial harbour into a creative district, Filmby Aarhus (FilmCity Aarhus) is the anchor point of Jutland's DVI. The three-building media cluster houses not only the West Danish Film Fund (DVF) but also VIA University College's Film and Transmedia BA programme, ca. 80 media businesses, two film studios and, beginning in 2020, publicly supported and grassroots-run film talent development initiatives such as Aarhus Film Workshop, Super8 and StationNext. Major industry events such as the annual this.nordic festival and conference are also held at FilmCity Aarhus, marking the complex as an important node for media businesses and practitioners in the region.

The municipality of Aarhus is only one of the ten municipalities in Jutland that contribute to the DVF, the regional film fund responsible for supporting film and media production and the development of screen culture in the areas under its remit (see Figure 1). The DVF secretariat, a small team of fewer than five permanent staff, shares its personnel with the managing team of FilmCity Aarhus wherein it sits.

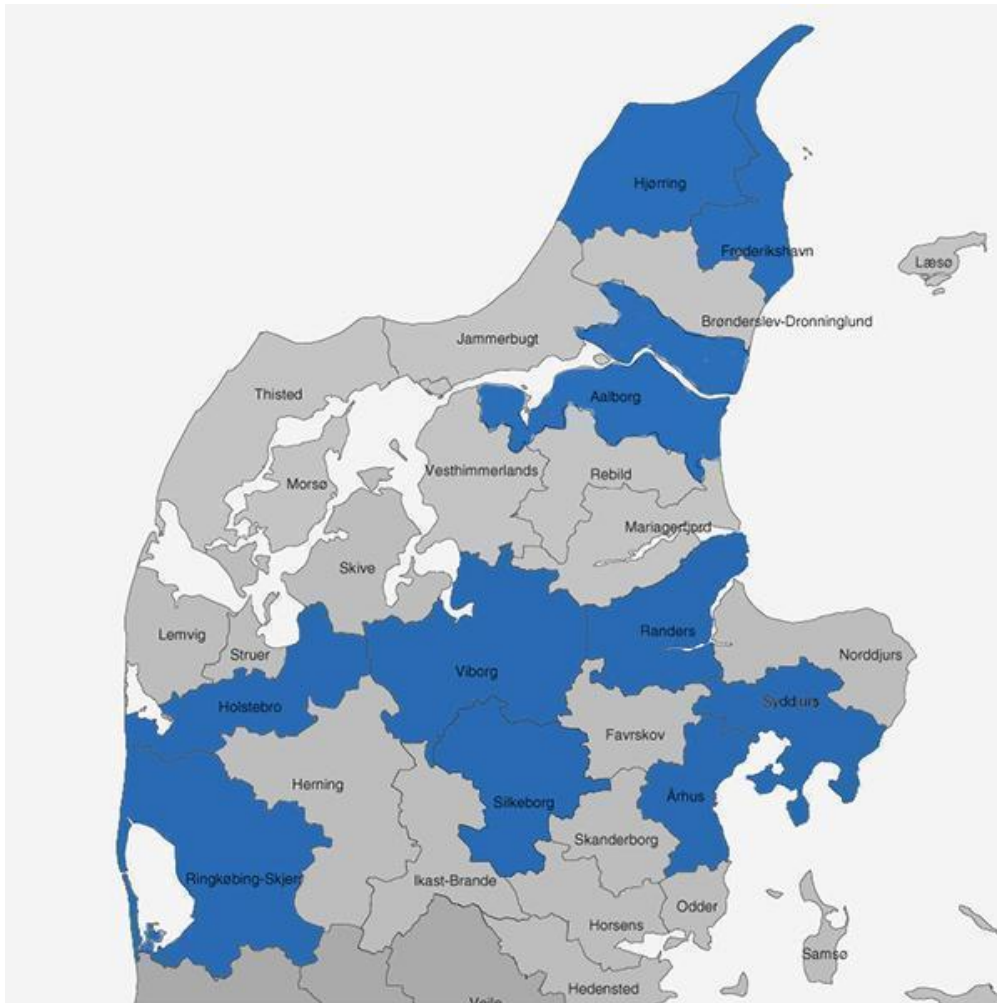


Figure 1: Map of member municipalities of the West Danish Film Fund (coloured in blue). Credits: Den Vestdanske Filmpulje.

DVF is publicly funded by its member municipalities and the state (via the Danish Film Institute). The aims of DVF are focused on developing and supporting film and media productions in the region, and primarily on funding productions that are ‘artistically interesting’ and that support the development of the production milieu in west Denmark (Den Vestdanske Filmpulje 2019a: 2). According to Steen Risom, the general manager of DVF, the fund’s primary emphasis is on raising production capacity in the region, and projects have to meet the criteria of having high artistic quality while at the same time being creatively or technically anchored in the region (Risom 2018: n.pag.). DVF also funds the development of festivals, talent development and other related initiatives that promote film culture in its member municipalities.

Inspired by the success of regional film funds like Film i Väst and the Rotterdam Film Fund in the Netherlands, the Danish Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Economic and

Business Affairs jointly commissioned a report, *Regionale filmfonde* ('Regional film funds') (Task forcen for regionale filmfonde 2001) at the turn of the millennium to look into the development of similar regional entities in Denmark and the potential economic impact on regional employment and the audiovisual sector. Similar to the case of Norway, the report represented a notable shift in policy thinking about the public value of film from a focus on cultural and social value to instrumental value as a business area to be capitalized on, especially in the context of boosting local economies at the peripheries of Denmark. This conceptual framing of film as business still informs the key motivations of DVF, whose latest report, published in August 2019, tellingly titled *Film betaler sig* ('Film pays') primarily focuses on the regional economic effects of the fund's investments in film and media production. For instance, it emphasizes that within the period 2014–2018, every DKK 1 that the DVF invested in a production resulted in a return of DKK 3.3 in the form of regional revenue (Den Vestdanske Filmpulje 2019b: 9).

A secondary concern relates to the strengthening of the local film milieu, within which talent development is a crucial area. Besides offering grants for productions in development—the type of grants that play an important role in enabling creative innovation and risk-taking while also retaining a talent base in west Denmark—DVF also sponsors 'Nye talenter' (New Talents), an initiative supported by DVF, Aarhus Film Workshop and MAAN Rental. Grantees of the New Talents scheme undertake a six-month course in film development and are offered support from consultants who are themselves former producers, teachers and film consultants from the Danish Film School and the DFI's New Danish Screen scheme. These initiatives are an example of the 'zones of limited risk' that enable young and emerging talent to 'perfect their skills and refine their artistic vision' (Hjort 2005: 15). The unique placement of film education programmes (e.g. VIA's Film and Transmedia programme) and incubator spaces (e.g. IdeasLab) within the commercial media environment of FilmCity Aarhus has also meant that there is a high degree of exchange and flow between the training of new and emerging talent and the film and media businesses that would employ them. More often than not, new talents eventually establish their own companies and deal with other media entities in the ecosystem as bona fide businesses.

Between 2011 and 2019, DVF supported a total of 301 projects, providing funding for various formats and stages of the production process. This includes script development, research and development, and production for feature films, short films, documentaries, television series, computer games, animations, web series, interactive films, cinematic VR

and AR experiences, film festivals and of course feature films. Figure 2 below shows the spread of projects supported by DVF funding.

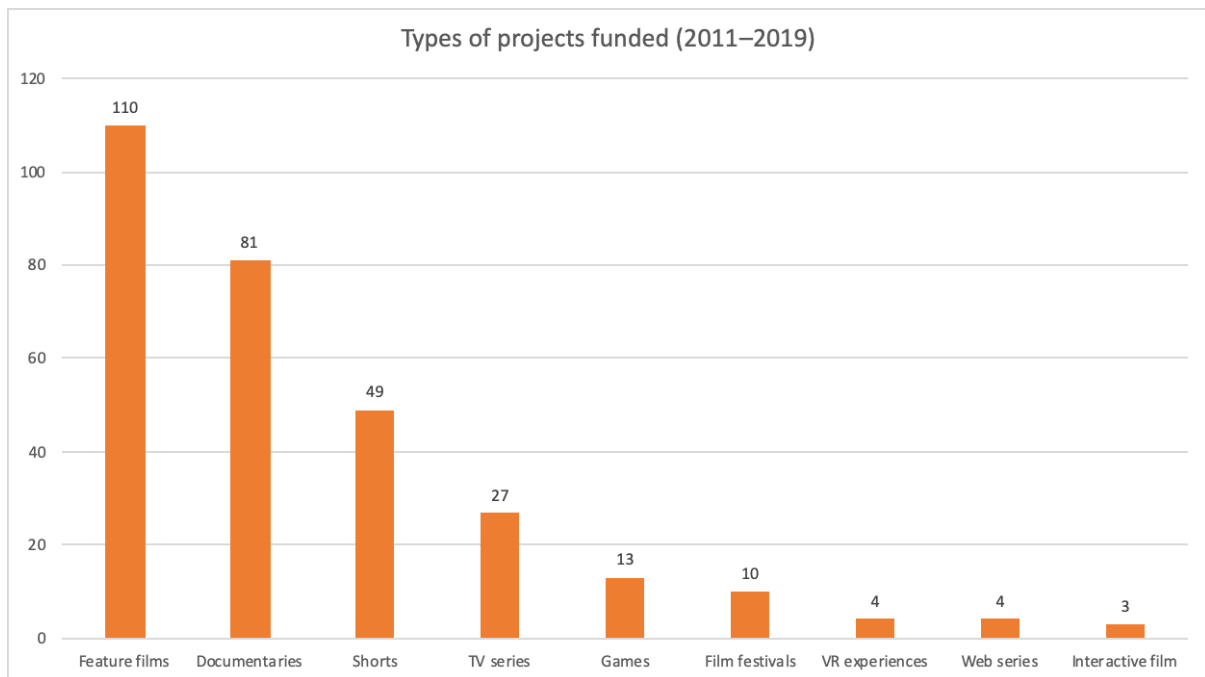


Figure 2: Distribution of types of projects supported by Den Vestdanske Filmpulje, 2011–2019.

Credits: Pei-Sze Chow (compiled from data published by DVF).

While conventional feature film and documentary projects dominate much of DVF’s funding work, it is notable that the fund also supports other screen media beyond film and television, for instance gaming and VR productions; support for these has lately been more prominent. Since 2015, DVF has supported four cinematic VR productions that include work by MANND — a two-woman cinematic VR production company that began as a student group in VIA’s Film and Transmedia programme and whose works have since been featured at the Cannes, Venice, and Luxembourg Film Festivals.

Regional film policy in Denmark

The political and economic arguments that establishing regional film funds and film centres is important to the decentralization of film activity in Denmark have become more prominent over time, and successive Film Agreements since the publication of the 2001 report have seen modest shifts in state support for regional film production. The agreements for 2007–2010 and 2011–2014 both directed DKK 7 million per year to regional film production as a whole

(Danish Ministry of Culture 2006: 7 and 2010: 3). It was not until the 2015-2018 Film Agreement that the state subsidy for regional productions was shared equally between FilmFyn and DVF, with each receiving DKK 7 million (Danish Ministry of Culture 2014: 4). This money was offered on top of the DKK 14 million to be distributed by the DFI to regionally based productions not receiving support from either of the two regional film funds. This was a move that Carsten Holst, former chief of DVF and FilmCity Aarhus, said was ‘a political endorsement that films should be made all over the country’ (Jensen 2014).

The 2019–23 Film Agreement represents a dramatic leap in the political attention given to the cultural and economic potentials of regional film production and was a result of concerted lobbying by representatives from the DFI, practitioners and businesses from the film industry and regional municipalities (Chow forthcoming: n.pag.). The CEO of the DFI, Claus Ladegaard, stated in 2018 that diversity was one of the three priorities for the DFI over the 2019-2023 period, and aside from ‘diversity’ in terms of gender and social background, geographical diversity was a specific focal point (Mitchell 2019). In the forthcoming period, each film fund will be given DKK 23.7 million annually, which is more than triple the amount they previously received from the state (Danish Ministry of Culture 2018: 3). Yet this additional money comes with restrictions in that it may only be used to fund productions of ‘artistic quality’ that further the cause of Danish cinema. More specifically, the money may only be used to develop feature films, documentaries, short films and animated films and excludes certain types of productions, for example incoming international productions, television series or web series. Such projects would be supported by a different pot of money to which municipalities directly contribute. Nevertheless, the new injection of state funds is a significant boost, not only to support more productions but also to contribute to a momentum and critical mass that might generate a steady production volume to sustain the regional film ecosystem.

Current challenges: Critical mass and Copenhagen-centrism

There is at present emphatic political support for the regionalization of Danish film, as reflected in the increased funding provided through the latest Film Agreement. With the latest injection of funds from the state comes an interesting dilemma: should the fund support a greater number of small productions or focus on a smaller number of high-profile and high-quality productions? Finding the right balance between the two options is one of the challenges that DVF currently faces. With this boost, DVF is hoping to achieve a level of critical mass that will entice practitioners to stay in the region and thereby strengthen the

screen milieu over time (Den Vestdanske Filmpulje 2019b: 22). Morten Rasmussen, director of the production company Deluca Film, suggests that the region currently lacks practitioners who are highly skilled in A-function roles (i.e. producer, director, cinematographer, screenwriter), and a lot of money is spent on hiring these practitioners from Copenhagen (quoted in Den Vestdanske Filmpulje 2019b: 23). Yet with the increased funding, it is hoped that more production activity in the region will make it more likely that screen practitioners will stay permanently in west Denmark.

Related to the question of production volume is therefore talent development and retention: central to the sustainability of regional film milieus is, among other factors, the presence of a stable base of talented and skilled film professionals at all levels. It is thus clear to DVF that a sustainable means of nurturing and retaining local talent is just as important as being able to distribute generous funds for productions. Yet, despite the presence of viable regional opportunities, Copenhagen remains a magnet for emerging and established talent simply due to the concentration of expertise and opportunities in the capital.

In 2017 the DFI published a report on social and geographic diversity in the Danish film workforce in the period 2010–2015, where it was found that the capital region is over-represented as the primary place of residence of practitioners in the film industry (Fjællegaard 2017: 6). While such clustering of film labour in one particular geographical area (such as in Hollywood or London) is not uncommon, it is significant that the report found that the majority of these practitioners were born and grew up in the capital region as well. One reading of this phenomenon is that the Danish film industry retains an overwhelmingly Copenhagen-centric perspective, with little or low mobility of film practitioners from the capital to the various Danish regions.

While the screen industry in Aarhus is making strides locally and internationally, it still faces problems in gaining recognition from major institutions and industry practitioners in Copenhagen while maintaining legitimacy in the public eye. Further, in the west Danish context, the general talent outflow from the regions to the capital is part of a more complex cultural issue. In interviews with individual screen practitioners in Aarhus conducted by the author between July 2018 and May 2019,² a common refrain was that many in the regional milieu end up moving to Copenhagen for several reasons, including more and better opportunities for employment and skills training and a (perceived) higher level of professionalism. While some do eventually return to the west Denmark region, citing reasons such as a better life for family or a desire to work within a familiar network of colleagues, not many do, and the same attitudes about the differences in legitimacy, opportunities and

professionalism between the capital and the periphery still prevail. Hence, while retaining and attracting talent back to the region is a crucial matter for the regional screen agency, perhaps a more fundamental negotiation regarding attitudes and understanding is required. As Stefan Pellegrini, a producer, director and CEO of Dionysus Media in Aarhus says, ‘keeping people here is a question of changing our cultural understanding of the different regions’ (Pellegrini 2019: n.pag.).

Much of the frustration felt by screen practitioners in west Denmark were recently voiced at a day-long industry conference organized by Dionysus Media and the Dansk Skuespillerforbund (Danish Actors’ Association), ‘Film i Vestdanmark’ (Film in West Denmark), held at FilmCity Aarhus (Producentforeningen 2019). The event was attended by a swathe of film practitioners such as cinematographers, actors, directors, producers and sound designers based in the region. The specific problems discussed included the structural barriers (high travel expenses, long journeys, absence of opportunities) that prevent actors based in the periphery from attending casting sessions that are frequently held only in the capital, and unconscious biases against regionally based technical and artistic crew, i.e. the assumption that skill levels in the regions are low. Such issues are now being discussed at the local level but have yet to find purchase with key decision-makers and policy-makers from the region and the capital who might have the power to bring about change. There are thus both political and cultural barriers—such as the lack of political awareness of practical problems and biases faced by practitioners based in the regions—that need to be overcome and addressed not solely through increased funding, but via policy change and further dialogue between the various stakeholders.

Strategies: diversification and internationalization

One of the ways that DVF is attempting to strengthen the talent pool in west Denmark is to diversify its support scope beyond traditional film, reflecting global trends in television drama, VR and AR and computer games. DVF is able to pursue this direction as Aarhus and the west Danish region is already an existing hub for practitioners in these fields. FilmCity Aarhus, in conjunction with the VIA Film and Transmedia team and partners in the EU Create Converge consortium,³ regularly support initiatives, events and networking platforms for those working across different screen formats. Most recently, the three entities collaborated to publish an anthology on the region’s knowledge and insights in producing new dimensions of cinematic storytelling, titled *Storytelling Beyond the Screen* (Paulsen

2019), in addition to collaborating on transnational events such as VR Connect (in June 2018) with partners in Malmö, Sweden and Hamburg, Germany.

One specific initiative that seeks to assert west Denmark's unique character as a production hub is the organization of the annual high-profile and international industry event, *this.nordic*. Since 2018, the three-day conference and media festival held at FilmCity Aarhus has attracted a roster of Nordic and international speakers to what the organizers call 'the Nordic equivalent of SXSW' (Culture Works 2018). Both the 2018 and 2019 iterations were well-attended by both regional practitioners and Copenhagen-based professionals in addition to public and commercial broadcasters across the Nordic countries and international companies like Netflix and HBO. This event, like VR Connect, suggests a more outward-facing, international attitude that signals a strategy that does not rely only on building closer links and collaborative projects with Copenhagen, but with overseas partners (some located in 'peripheral' regions themselves) as well. Such internationalizing initiatives function not only as showcases of regional expertise and talent, but more importantly as networking spaces and conduits that bring about the types of 'affinitive transnationalism' where collaboration is based on sharing core attitudes or problems and 'milieu-building transnationalism' that facilitates cross-border capacity building of a sustained nature (Hjort 2010: 49).

At the same time, the DVF and FilmCity Aarhus work collectively with other regions and organizations across the country to increase the capacity of film and audiovisual production in Denmark as a whole. Vision Denmark is an alliance of public and private organizations across the nation—including the regional film funds—that has been campaigning for the introduction of tax incentives to make Denmark a competitive place for international productions. An analysis of how tax incentives would work in Denmark is currently underway, and a pilot phase is due to take place in 2020 (Vision Denmark 2018: 22-23). As the digital visual industry grows, calls for the introduction of tax incentives in Denmark are growing stronger (Holse 2018).⁴

Regional comparisons

As one of the more popular branches of the cultural industries, the screen industries are 'crucial to creating representations of individuals, communities and nation states' (O'Brien, Allen and Friedman 2017: 272). Yet the global screen industries in general have long suffered from a lack of diversity in the creative and technical workforce. In the latter half of the 2010s, there has been increased attention directed towards improving diversity in the

Norwegian and Danish screen industries, especially with respect to devising strategies to strengthen and develop gender, ethnic and geographical diversity among practitioners in front of and behind the camera. However, ‘solving’ these issues involves deeply complex cultural and political processes that require coordination, cooperation and frank dialogue between stakeholders at regional and national levels. The two case studies presented here have shown that talent retention and development are significant concerns for both Tromsø and Aarhus, and it seems that the key to addressing the outflow of talent in both cases is to increase each region’s production capacity and eventually to achieve a critical mass of activity that will make the regions an attractive and lucrative place for practitioners to live and work on a permanent basis. Where Tromsø and Aarhus diverge, however, is in the approach to addressing the issue, which to a large extent is affected by the level of policy and financial support from the respective film-political bodies at the regional and national level.

The production of commercial formats such as feature films and television series, particularly high profile or ‘prestige’ projects, is important for sustainability and usually involves more money than producing documentaries and shorts. So far, Tromsø still lags somewhat behind Aarhus in this regard. One obvious explanation is size; while both cities are peripheral cities, Aarhus is larger, with better infrastructure, more and bigger companies and a more developed film cluster in and around Filmby Aarhus. Its screen industry has double as many registered companies as Tromsø, where furthermore very few of them have more than two employees. Despite this, however, west Danish film and television companies are still involved primarily in the production stages of a project and less so in the development of new and original intellectual property, which happens mostly in Copenhagen. While DVF aims to continue supporting conventional film and television projects in the region, it does not seek to compete directly with Copenhagen on that front, but instead to create more opportunities for audiovisual experimentation in other formats such as VR, AR, animation and computer games. That some companies in Tromsø are also moving in this direction makes it clear that both regions are now starting to shift some attention towards supporting the production of new digital screen formats as a way to diversify the screen sector, create new business opportunities and reduce reliance on conventional screen formats.

The fact that Aarhus and Tromsø operate in somewhat different national contexts also manifests itself in the policy focus on culture versus economics. Diversity is an important film-political goal in both Norway and Denmark, but it seems that film practitioners in Tromsø are more focused on economic sustainability and basic survival than film practitioners in Aarhus. For northern Norway and Tromsø, diversity and economic factors are

strongly connected. The film sector struggles with low income and limited financial resources. So far, Tromsø has not succeeded in establishing companies with enough financial muscle to generate ongoing work opportunities. Furthermore, Aarhus has a much higher degree of clustering and flow between new talents and existing companies, while Tromsø is only now trying to move in this direction, as the establishment of Film Cluster North and Film Yard demonstrate.

Although the regional film agencies in northern Norway collaborate with other regional film agencies, competition between regions for state funding is a worrying trend. Aarhus and west Denmark, in contrast, favour not only a collaborative rather than competitive approach with other regional production hubs, but also a more actively internationalist attitude that seeks to strengthen production capacity and create opportunities for practitioners by cooperating with overseas partners.⁵ That the Danish state has effectively tripled the funding for regional film production is a welcome policy move that has fostered much optimism amongst DVF and its regional partners, but at the same time there is some uncertainty as to how best these monies should be invested to achieve the larger goal of establishing a critical mass of production activity.

While distributing more money to the regions is indeed one tangible way of addressing the challenges that face regional production milieus, the cultural issue of changing attitudes and perceptions about professionalism and opportunities in the regions versus in the film capitals is a more fundamental and difficult goal to achieve—yet has the potential to effect a significant and positive change in the futures of regional screen industries. As illustrated by concerns raised at the Film in West Denmark event in Aarhus, there has been some grassroots effort towards making visible the tensions between socio-geographical inequalities faced by regional practitioners and existing Bourdieusian processes of distinction—often originating from practitioner communities in the film capitals—that perceive and characterize the production capability and workforce in peripheral regions as lacking expertise and professionalism. Countering such attitudes and imbalances, often articulated through centre-periphery tropes, would require more dialogue and engagement with stakeholders at various levels. While this process of changing cultural attitudes undoubtedly takes time, incremental steps are being taken now: for instance, Aarhus-trained practitioners now working in Copenhagen act informally as ambassadors for the region's film workforce, while Copenhagen-based practitioners who have collaborated with practitioners in Aarhus are returning to the region to hire or work with local film talent (Højer 2018: n.pag.).

Conclusion

The development of regional film-cultural policy is quite similar in Norway and Denmark: diversifying the national film output on the basis of raising the visibility and participation of underrepresented groups outside the capital is an important rationale underlying the current enthusiasm for public funding in this area. At the same time, a more attractive and tangible motivation for increasing funding for regional production is that doing so creates a multiplier effect in boosting the regional economies and bringing much-needed investment into the respective countries' geographic peripheries. Both in Tromsø and Aarhus, regional film funds primarily focus on the local economic effects of their investments, with varying results.

Our comparison has identified two main strategies that regional funds employ to invigorate the local screen ecosystem: boosting production volume and investing in talent development. The crucial issue is production volume, where it is preferable to have a critical mass of continuous productions that can support a stable base of talented and skilled film professionals at all levels. Although Aarhus has a more developed screen industry than Tromsø, both sectors face many of the same challenges. Both lack practitioners who are highly skilled in A-function roles, forcing companies to hire such practitioners from Copenhagen and Oslo. Talents move away from the regions, as there are better or more opportunities for employment in the capital. Certain cultural attitudes that devalue expertise levels in the regions may also be at play, affecting the quality and quantity of opportunities available there. Nevertheless, both regions are attempting, to varying degrees, to address these concerns.

Our comparison has highlighted the relative success of Aarhus in strategically developing a sustainable regional ecosystem by adopting a diversified and international outlook. This includes actively supporting projects in new digital production formats and establishing transnational collaborations with similar regions rather than looking to or competing with practitioners in the capital or other regions within the same national frame for funding and opportunities. At a grassroots level, regional practitioners are also organizing platforms for greater dialogue and stepping up efforts to shift and transform cultural attitudes about talent and expertise beyond the film capital. There is only so much that extra funding can do when it comes to improving representation in the screen industry, and there certainly needs to be a concerted effort to reframe geographically and culturally inflected (mis)perceptions and biases in order to rebalance the scales between centre and periphery.

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Notes

¹ Size is also a substantial difference: Tromsø has approximately 77,000 inhabitants, while Aarhus is more than four times as large with circa 340,000 inhabitants.

² Seventeen interviews were conducted between July 2018 and May 2019 by Pei-Sze Chow with practitioners in various roles: creative directors, film fund managers, film school teachers and students, producers, and filmmakers.

³ Create Converge is supported by the European Union North Sea Region VB Programme 2014–2020.

⁴ Denmark is one of the few European countries to date that does not offer tax incentives for incoming foreign productions. Other countries include Luxembourg and Liechtenstein.

⁵ For instance, a commercial company like M2Film has outposts in the UK, USA and Thailand and film-educational programmes like VIA University College’s Film & Transmedia and The Animation Workshop have long-standing and extensive collaborations with partners in Canada and China.