«An Unintended Effect of the Introduction of the Public Support Systems» – Film policy, film support and the contemporary Scandinavian production landscape

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English abstract

This article is concerned with the conditions for contemporary European film production as exemplified by the particular example of Scandinavia and Sweden. The investigation is a comparative survey where particular statistics, on contemporary as well as historical audiovisual production, serves as a base for a compare and contrast study. More specifically, an attempt is made to assess and relate some of the existing conditions and structural alterations within the present environment to the introduction of film policy and film support in the 1960s.

The abovementioned argument is contextualized in two ways. First, a historical perspective is introduced where the current situation is compared to an era during which vertically integrated companies existed in Scandinavia and many groups of film workers were under long-term contracts. Second, the introduction of public film support during the 1950s and 1960s in most parts of Europe is considered. This is done since the support seemed to have had the unintentional effect of facilitating the making of films without an «industrial backbone», as one observer has put it.

Keywords: Scandinavian film production, cultural policy, film policy, film production, organization of work within the cultural sector
In what follows, I would like to consider some of the current conditions of contemporary European feature film production as exemplified by the particular example of the Scandinavian and Swedish context. More specifically, I will attempt to assess and relate some of the existing conditions and structural alterations within the present environment to the introduction of film policy and film support.

In quintessence, the investigation is consequently structured as a compare-and-contrast study, centred on how circumstances within the film production sector, and the way work within that sector has been organized, has changed historically over time. Hence, while the production sector appear to have been ordered and structured in a certain way before the introduction of film policy and film support in the early 1960s in Sweden, it has since been radically transformed. At the heart of the matter is evidently if this transformation and some of the perhaps less attractive characteristics of the present organization and function of the sector can possibly be attributed to the introduction of the said policies and, moreover, the specific ways in which they have been implemented.

A significant rationale informing the enquiry is that a number of recent scholarly works and related reports has, in various ways, been concerned with the vulnerable situation, intermittent work opportunities and often threadbare pay facing a majority of those aiming to support themselves by supplying their skills to the Scandinavian creative industries in general and to the film sector in particular (Dahlström and Hermelin 2007; Flisbäck 2011; Hedling 2012). Several scholarly explorations into related, somewhat broader, subject matters have also pointed out how the film production field in general, and especially so in Europe, is marked by intense competition, is highly volatile, tends to migrate and is characterized by the prevalence of small, independent, financially fragile agents (Hedling 2010a, p. 341; Lange and Westcott 2004, p. 158).

Accordingly, the foremost question asked is, can the introduction and development of film policy, and the various support forms in their national, regional and transnational guises, be said to have influenced the production environment, its structure and its general means of existence? Moreover, if such an influence can be detected, is it relevant to speak about how film policy in some ways has had unintended, and perhaps even detrimental effects on the production sector? This, of course, may be regarded as inconsistent since the large majority of the support systems were designed for and directed towards the production sector specifically.

The study draws on an array of sources and methods related both to the humanities and the social sciences. Among them are what can be termed a form of anthropological inquiry or, in another phrase, observations of production as «lived experience» as production studies scholars have recently termed the method (Mayer, Banks and Caldwell 2009, p. 9).

In late 2006, I was approached to start an academic program at Lund University in southern Sweden in connection with the audio-visual production activities in nearby Ystad. The town is the site of one of four Swedish regional film funds that since some time has supported and hosted more or less continuous feature film production (Hedling 2010b). After a master’s programme in Film and Media Producing was eventually established, I came to serve as the programme’s coordinator.

The experience meant increasing contacts with the production environment as I, among other things, came to employ several producers, directors, writers and production managers as teachers, guest lecturers and so on. Driving them to class, sitting in while they talked, making brief visits at
their homes and offices as well as hearing them reflect upon past and upcoming projects gave me insights and points of entry into a sphere which otherwise can be difficult to penetrate from a scholarly position. In addition, I became a member of a small regional network, consisting of people from the industry, cinema managers, film fund representatives, local public servants with a professional interest in audiovisual production and so on. The regular meetings, limited endeavours and informal friendship developed within this group expanded my exposure to the everyday existence of the «business».

Additionally, in 2010, I also came to be involved in a general, more traditional comparative survey of the contemporary conditions of audiovisual production in Scandinavia (Bondebjerg and Novrup Redvall 2011). This report was commissioned by an entity called the ThinkTank on European Film and Film Policy – led by the former Head of the Danish Film Institute, Henning Camre – and with the backing of the Swedish, the Norwegian and the Danish film institutes.1 Here I served as a contributor of Swedish material. The result of the collective exercise meant among other things that a certain amount of empirical data, particularly concerning film production in Scandinavia during the last decade, was amassed.

The abovementioned inroads, together with specific parts of the recognized historiography of Swedish film will henceforth serve as the background for the brief inquiry. The institutional organization of Swedish film production as well as the parallel development of film policy, nationally instigated in 1963, is thus taken into particular consideration. And as stated previously, under investigation are some of the radically changed conditions of audiovisual production within a particular, domestic European setting during the last sixty-seventy years.

A brief history of the production infrastructure

As Swedish film entered into a mature phase in the 1930s, the national industry moved steadily towards an integration of production, distribution and exhibition interests (Furhammar 2003, p. 174f). Eventually, this meant that three (alternatively four, depending on the classification of one peculiar business) companies became the dominant feature in matters related to the industry. From a comparative point of view, a modest domestic version of the Hollywood studio system, a vertically integrated oligopoly in economic terms, was shaped. Such a national formation appears to not have been uncommon during the early sound period. Similar developments are consequently noticeable among several, European national industries at roughly the same time, for instance in the UK (Hill 1996, p. 108).

Beside these «majors», a number of more independent constellations of producers, distributors, single cinemas and chains existed. The system was comparatively thriving and was commercial in nature. Concurrently it was the subject of extensive selective taxation which meant it generated revenue for the government. This selective taxation may of course also be seen an implicit indication of an earlier era’s political elite view that neither the production nor the consumption of film were, principally, particularly vital enterprises and pastimes.

Nonetheless, the industry was also a source of employment for many people. For instance, one of the vertically integrated companies, Svensk Filmindustri’s (Swedish Film Industry) studio facility Filmstaden (The Film-Town) – opened in May 1920, and the largest of its kind in Scandinavia ever – had more than 450 people employed more or less permanently from the 1930s until the early
1950s, in production only. Accordingly, everyone from actors and directors of photography, to carpenters, painters, electricians and even a blacksmith was under contract. Photos, other evidence and what films that exist documenting the activities of the facility, depicts a highly developed, comprehensive and specialized factory environment not dissimilar to those found on the American west coast at the time (Wahlgren 2002; Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1991). Employees have white coats, dungarees or just plain clothing according to if they performed the tasks of, say, a lab technician, a grip or a script girl.

In short, and even if they worked in northern and marginal Sweden, these employees were organized as a «set of departmentalized technical workers and specialists», in a way similar to how Janet Staiger has characterized the emerging Hollywood studio factories (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, p. 142). Testimonies from those working at Filmstaden regularly, Ingmar Bergman for example, speak of a professional environment which «contained a wealth of professional and skilled trade traditions» (Bergman 1988, p. 67).

Moreover, each of these vertically integrated companies produced a slate of five to eight in-house features a year while also renting out studio space to producers from outside (the major companies had regular affiliates and on occasion took a financial and production interest in some of these films as well). Filmstaden, the largest of the facilities, was accordingly able to house as much as 20–30 features a year at the top of its capability (Bergman p. 67). Together with other kinds of production and services that were performed – shorter films of various kinds, documentaries, commercials, lab work – the activity filled and supported the amenities as round-the-year places of permanent work and manufacture.

Moreover, and to get a historical, comparative perspective on the present situation, which will be assessed below, it can be mentioned that of the 240 feature films made in Sweden in the 1930s, one third was produced by two of the «majors» while there was a comparatively small proliferation of slighter companies, somewhat more than thirty, that between them contributed half of the total output. This situation has led film historians to the conclusion that this particular period may be characterized as volatile and full of financial gold-diggers who were attracted to the expanding business (Furhammar, p. 141). In retrospect, and with the more present situation setting in hindsight – as said, it will be presented and discussed below – the period may rather be deemed to have been fairly stable. Only a small minority of the aggregated output was hence made by the type of very temporary collaborations distinguishing today’s production environment, meaning that an incorporated entity makes just one film.

As in most other territories, the system was put under considerable pressure as a result of the introduction of television. In Sweden this took place in 1956 in the form of a state controlled monopoly, loosely based on the British public service idea (Furhammar, p. 249). Immediately, film production and cinema attendance went into decline. Moreover, a stream of artisans and craftsmen migrating away from the older medium to the new one was soon detectable (Furhammar, p. 292). This, I believe, should not be interpreted as a sign of admitting failure. Rather, it presumably happened because the new medium could offer working conditions and terms of employment which the film business increasingly had a hard time to match.

As these developments were in process, however, something else happened which is highly characteristic of the period under scrutiny, has parallels in most other European countries, while it also points to the state of affairs under which most of the Continent’s film production is still subject.
The introduction of film policy and the decline of the film industry

Just as in a number of other European countries, the two concurrent, post-World War II tendencies of, on the one hand, increasing economic difficulties for the national film industry and, on the other, the developing recognition of film as a significant contemporary art form appears to have been imperative incentives behind the introduction of film policy and public support of the medium (Thompson and Bordwell 2010, p. 326f). The Swedish support system was inaugurated in 1963 through the labours of Harry Schein, film critic and a well-known confidant to the domestic political elite (Sundholm et al. 2012, p. 337).

In this year, the Swedish Film Institute (Svenska Filminstitutet, hereafter SFI), designed and intended as the main support agency, was established with Schein as its first head. At the time the industry as well as the exhibition segment was in severe crisis. Schein and the Social Democratic government, as a result, assumed that for the national film industry to survive there was a need for public intervention and support. For Schein, furthermore, there was the additional, aesthetically motivated goal of transforming the national cinema into an increasingly prestigious, consecrated and legitimized medium of high cultural artistic value.

This new support scheme, set up in the form of an agreement, or a contract, between the government, the film producers, the cinema owners and the film distributors' association, was both general and selective at the same time (Furhammar, p. 262). Its funding came from a newly imposed fee of ten percent on cinema admissions while the previous selective taxation was skipped. The system contained support for Swedish producers in general (dependent on particular criteria, like box office performance) and for certain film related activities like for instance a film archive, the marketing of Swedish film at festivals and generally abroad as well as educational initiatives like a library and a cinemateque. In addition, a national film school was launched in 1964.

However, an at once controversial and celebrated element of agreement, was that a substantial part of the available support (around 30 per cent) was reserved for «quality» grants and financial assurance to films that economically failed with general audiences but were nevertheless deemed to be aesthetically satisfying, or of a certain «quality». These support grants were presented to individual films based on what a select committee (usually a few critics and intellectuals plus Schein as chair) regarded as particular artistic merit.

In a discussion of Pierre Bourdieu’s writings on the sociology of cultural taste in relation to film support and policy, British film scholar John Hill, has termed this sort of selective mechanism as an «explicit cultural policy». An important part of the new policy was consequently to declare that, and here Hill quotes Bourdieu extensively, «not all modes of cultural expressions are accorded equal «dignity and value» in a given society but are «organized according to a hierarchy independent of individual opinions, which defines cultural legitimacy and its gradations» (Hill 2004, p. 30).

Thus, a system was created which rather methodically, although always implicitly, gave preference to films by perceived auteurs and at least initially, a «new political and social bias» (McIlroy 1986, p. 84). Just as methodically, the system disfavoured comedies and more traditional, mainstream entertainment, disregarding these forms’ traditional attractiveness among audiences. In fairness, it should be mentioned, that a genre like, for instance, children’s film was also, to some extent, privileged, meaning that the production of this particular type of film experienced an instant increase as a consequence of the instigation of the reform.
Nonetheless, one may speak of a sort of systemic bias and long lasting proclivity for certain types of film by what de facto became a form of a national film authority. This bias has been discussed and labelled in terms of «the Swedish art cinema institution», a turn of phrase clearly inspired by British film scholar Steve Neale’s seminal article «Art Cinema as Institution» (Andersson 1995; Neale 1981). In addition, at least one other observer described the reform in terms of a «radical reorganisation, matched by few other countries in the world» (McIlroy, p. 84).

Although the film agreement, as it came to be called, was subsequently renegotiated every six years or so, certain guiding principles of the once established system still remained. The quality grants, for instance, rather soon had to be replaced due to external pressures affecting the entire field of feature film production, not only in Scandinavia and Sweden, but in Europe as a whole.

Accordingly, and despite increasing financial input from television as a consequence of the deregulation of European broadcasting in the 1980s, the flow of private and corporate capital came to dwindle to European, Scandinavian and Swedish feature film production from the 1970s on (De Vinck 2011, p. 260). Because of this state of affairs, the support systems had to change and be revised. A transformation to a more proactive approach soon became noticeable. Having awarded films on the basis of the finished product, the scarcity of funding meant that the support, or the subsidies, more and more had to be conferred as a part of the financial means of production so that some form of regular film making could continue.

To give premiums in retrospect consequently has been replaced by preproduction aid given as a result of a review procedure based on factors such as the manuscript, the above-the-line personnel, and increasingly a number of further provisions. Besides, various new public bodies, such as regional funds, Scandinavian co-production entities like Nordisk Film & TV Fond, and transnational initiatives such as Eurimages has been added to the financing structure surrounding the Swedish and Scandinavian audiovisual industries. This, in turn, has meant that the number of requisites regarding production funding has multiplied sequentially. To mention just a few, the gender composition of the crew, the place of physical production and whether the work in question presents opportunities for co-productions between countries are all crucial determining factors particular to specific public funding bodies. To attempt a summation of all of these restructurings and differing funding mechanisms is almost but impossible. However, a relatively informed guess about some form of tendency in relation to the present queries is that the general part, based on box-office returns, has gradually diminished in favour of various selective and discriminative mechanisms.

Seen from an economic and organizational point of view, the new system had notable effects and despite the above characterisation as «radical», the reform was in reality not so un-similar to what was introduced in many European countries around the same time. First, one may speak of how, although the available funds for production temporarily increased, financial incentives became vague, mainly through the introduction of the somewhat unpredictable quality grants and through them an irrespectively independent, additional decision-maker. Or in other words, an intervening and in a sense arbitrary and not-transparent mechanism or agency was introduced between the producer (the supply) and the audience (the demand). The previous, apparent incentive of attempting to maximize a film’s audience, in a way became, ambiguous and unclear.

In short, should producers make films aimed at satisfying as large an audience as possible or to please the critical sensibilities of a narrowly situated committee. During the first years of the system, the second strategy quite often seems to have been pursued since, due to the amounts given to...
individual titles, if one got lucky, the film could be a financial success regardless of the circumstance that it had been seen by a very narrow audience. One outcome of the new system was consequently that despite a greater number of annual domestic productions, the market share for Swedish cinema declined on the domestic market throughout the 1960s (Furhammar, p. 309).

That producers appeared to have an increasingly hard time to navigate this new setup was implicitly acknowledged by even Schein himself. When interviewed on Swedish television in 1965 and asked whether he could identify any difficulties in the remodelled film environment, he suggested first, a lack of talent and, second, the right kind of producers (Schein 1965). A few years later, moreover, he plainly stated that a key idea behind the support system was to strengthen the position of certain directors at the cost of the traditional managing role played by film producers. At the same time, however, he briefly speculated if the change possibly had been too swift (Schein 1970, p. 151). But even though the SFI’s managing director was able to identify that the producer’s lot had become more intricate, he was nonetheless reluctant to admit that the cause for this may have been found in the director-centred framework that the new policy consciously strived to create as well as in the inconsistent financial incentives recalled above. The structural modification, brought about as result of replacing awards to finished films with preproduction aids, appear not to have altered these inconsistent incentives.

Partly due to the aforementioned, but most certainly because attendance continued to dwindle, the production sector and the traditional industry continued to shrink as well as be transformed. By the late 1960s, the vertically integrated companies had all shut down their film studios. At the beginning of the 1980s, furthermore, three major companies became two, as one was swallowed by another and, twenty years later, in the mid 2000s, the one remaining competitor was transformed out of recognition. Moreover, as the decades wore on, after the 1960s, the production and initiation of films increasingly became a task associated with the SFI itself and with smaller production houses and independent producers who rarely were able to lastingly expand their activities (Furhammar, p. 342–343). Within this new environment, with its fluctuating and intermittent film making, the former regular working conditions and terms of employment simply could not be met. Despite cable television, the VCR, DVD, Blu-ray, VoD and the vastly expanded audiences these distribution channels has brought to films, the production side as an industry – at least in Europe and more specifically in this case, Sweden – seems to never have been able to quite recover.

Consequently, although film support has always been geared towards mainly supporting the production part of the industry, it is in fact this segment that, perhaps paradoxically, seems to have become most destabilized and frail as a result of historical change and the introduction of the named support. Working in and producing films seem to have become something quite different from what it was during «classical» times. Then, the sector seemed, at least compared to today, somewhat more stable and thriving enough to at least permanently employ quite a few regular white and blue collar workers, as well as producers, directors and specialist artisans.3 Presently, and as two Swedish social and economic geographers who recently undertook a large survey on film workers – mentioned at the beginning – concluded, the production sector has increasingly become «a tight and difficult sector for regular incomes» (Dahlström and Hermelin, p. 117).

Making films in the 2000s

As in many European countries, the contemporary Swedish production landscape consequently appears volatile and fragmented (De Vinck, p 191). The segment is mostly populated by small,
comparably fragile producers and production companies who, on their part, have to rely on a select group of mainly public financial sources (Bondebjerg and Redvall, p. 37; De Vinck, p. 197). Accordingly, in relation to the period during which Swedish film was dominated by an oligopoly of three vertically integrated fully commercial companies, only one of these now remain, Svensk Filminindustri (SF). Here, however, the centre of attention seems of lately to have been resolutely on distribution and exhibition. During the five year time period between 2002 and 2006, for instance, the company was the main producer of only seven films, or an annual average of one and a half film (Bondebjerg and Redvall, p. 39). Sandrews Metronome, meanwhile, another vertically integrated company and SF:s final contender, first sold its cinema chain in 2006 and then, 18 months later, proclaimed that it had decided to finally cease feature production after some seven decades (Cullberg 2007). In effect, Sandrews Metronome transformed itself into a distributor only, a circumstance that seemingly indicates where some profitability in the European film business still exists.

That leaves the sector with an extended group of small independent production companies. Their low level of capitalization and, therefore, their restricted access to the benefits and credits of the financial market distinguish these businesses and their ways of operation. This is due to films rightly being perceived as a high-risk activity (Lange and Westcott 2004, p. 158). Most companies contributing to the output of a given year are, thus, most often, making just one film.

Using various figures compiled for the previously mentioned investigation into both the Swedish and Scandinavian production scene during the last decade, a number of circumstances can be laid bare. Since most of these figures were compiled from information on the websites of the respective film institutes, it should also be mentioned that they most often list a single company as the main producer of a single film while mentioning one or more companies as co-producer/s.

Looking at Sweden during the five years from 2002 until 2006, a period during which the annual theatrical production fluctuated quite a bit but averaged around 35–40 films, just two companies were able to be the main producer of eight films or slightly less than two films per annum. A few of the companies not among those two, however, seem somewhat more robust than would be the case at first glance if one adds the co-production contributions to their activity as main producer on an individual film. Moreover, only thirteen firms were able to produce as much as four films during the aforementioned time span, meaning that this select group was the only part of the production sector having an average output of almost one film a year. These figures, in turn, can be contrasted with what may conveniently be described as the other end of the production segment. Consequently, 124 companies made three or less films during the same time frame. 101 of these made just a single film during the five years studied.

Now, it seems inevitable to hold forth a few reservations regarding these figures. The entertainment business in general and the film business in particular may be considered an exceedingly intricate legal entity, marked by innumerable judicial complexities that make it particularly non-transparent. Furthermore, ever since the end of World War II and the Paramount decision it is also the case that, smaller, sometimes independent companies, rather than the distributing studios, have increasingly been responsible for Hollywood production (Bordwell and Thompson, p. 300; De Vinck, p. 205). Hence, a proliferation of production companies has been an increasing trend on the part of American cinema too, a development easily detected just by reading the information in credit sequences in a very long line of films and comparing these with credits of pre-1950s Hollywood films. Supposedly, and just as their European and Scandinavian counterparts, many of these contemporary companies are responsible for a very limited, aggregated output as well. Going back
to the Swedish situation, described above, one may also note that some of these companies are active as suppliers of television and other media material, something not visible in the quoted figures. Accordingly, one could have supposed that a number of them may lead a decidedly much livelier existence than the figures indicate.

However, this is in a way contradicted by the earlier quoted survey by two Swedish social and economic geographers. Among other things they proposed that infrequent work opportunities appear to be a routine within the wider audio-visual production sector, at least according to investigations concerned with a broader category, defined as «film workers». Hence, they conclude that only 25 per cent of the film workers in a large survey received 75 per cent or more of their income from film work (Dahlström and Hermelin, p. 120). Most of them worked as freelancers.

With respect to how tricky it is for this category to receive unemployment benefits in Sweden, it is noteworthy that at the three major regional production centres of the time, an average of more than 25 percent had been recipients of support during the year of observation. As a result, many longed for more opportunities for doing film-related work. From personal experience, accounted for at the beginning of this text, this circumstance is also something that I have very frequently encountered when speaking with freelance film workers.

Nevertheless, as the earlier mentioned report was presented in December 2010, additional evidence was presented that seem to confirm the frailty of the contemporary Scandinavian production sector. Moreover, it was shown how several key occupations in regard to film were given extremely infrequent opportunities to practice their trade.

Accordingly, Henning Camre himself had conducted a survey he had titled «Production Frequencies in Scandinavia» which was presented as a series of powerpoint slides and later posted on the ThinkTank’s homepage (Camre 2011). Here, Camre had investigated how many credits directors, screenwriters, producers and production companies in Norway, Sweden and Denmark respectively, individually assembled during the nine years 2002–2010. This investigation was perhaps even more revealing than the one that has been accounted for above.

In regard to the frequency of activity among Scandinavian production companies Camre’s findings corresponded well with the ones I had been able to come up with. Moreover, since the time span investigated was more extended, it may additionally be suggested that what had earlier been found out was not a temporary inconsistency but rather was confirmed as the common state of things. Moreover, with regard to the other categories that had been scrutinized, numbers did not improve. Consequently, 100 directors in Norway had made only one film each during the nine years studied, while three had made as many as four or more. In Sweden, 124 directors had made one film each while six had been able to do four and one even five in nine years. In Denmark, furthermore, things seemed a little bit better although not significantly so. As many as 71 had thus directed only one single film during the observed time span while thirteen had shot four or more.

Looking at individual producers, not companies, 62 Norwegian producers had been able to contribute only one of the altogether 177 features made in that country during the nine years 2002–2010. Meanwhile, ten producers had come up with five films or more. Similarly in Sweden, 193 individual producers were responsible for the altogether 229 theatrical films made.
Accordingly, 129 persons had produced one single film during a period in which just 15 producers had been involved in five or more films. Finally in Denmark, 46 producers had made just one film while twelve had been occupied with making five or more titles. Considering the statistics regarding the frequency of how often screenwriters get their work filmed in all three countries very much confirms the picture described above.

For that reason, it seems fair to say that the Scandinavian and Swedish film community is crowded with supposedly highly skilled professionals of various kinds who only very intermittently get the opportunity to practice their trade.

In a recent account of current conditions for British television workers, it was concluded that these professionals «face an unstable environment» and that their «career progression can only be haphazard» (Paterson, p. 98). The prospects for their Swedish counterparts in the film industry appear very much analogous.

A concluding query

In Henning Camre’s posted, abovementioned remarks, he additionally notes how it has become possible to make films in present Scandinavia without what he terms an «industrial backbone» (Camre 2011). Meanwhile, the deduction is made that the development is «an unintended effect of the introduction of the public support systems» or in slightly different words, of film policy. To Camre, the process of a decaying industrial structure, and the simultaneous dilution of critical mass have, unquestionably, has had detrimental effects on the films made:

The problem is that companies only producing a film every now and then or maybe once in their existence do not possess the necessary competences to take a film through its potential
value chain. They do not generate new projects and any experience gathered is tied to individuals and do not contribute to establish a critical mass of experience and know how that are needed to build strong entities. (Camre 2011)

In other words, Camre seems to assume that companies, or other forms of organizational entities, with people continuously employed, steadily working away, communicating and learning from each other within this particular field, is more conducive to the making of film and other audiovisual products than the present, fragmented environment consisting of what Camre terms many «one-time visitors» (Camre 2011).

As outlined above, the dismantling of the traditional production infrastructure in Sweden also – and to some extent, in the other Scandinavian countries as well – very much corresponds with the establishment of film policy, film support and certain administrative principles governing the allocation of that support. Nevertheless, even if a negative correlation may seem to exist between the two developments, it is important to emphasize that this does not necessarily mean that a causal relationship is present. As a conclusion, a brief query at the point of intersection between contemporary film policy and film production will be examined in an attempt to illuminate at least a few of the many possible structural dilemmas within the present European, Scandinavian and Swedish production setup.

In most public European production support systems as well as in the Swedish one, a producer essentially applies for support for a single project or, in other words, a single film. This mode of procedure has been privileged at the expense of for instance supporting a slate of projects by a single company or a group or, say, an individual company’s aggregated output during a given period of time. Undeniably, this way of distributing subsidies has contributed to the proliferation of small companies. Now, there may be something seemingly attractive in a system where the threshold of entering film production is comparatively low and where the public bodies supplying much of the funding get a say each time a film is produced. However, this modus operandi does not appear as the most advantageous way regarding how to build a lasting and successful production industry where artists and workers get the opportunity to be recurrently active and not only very intermittently.

In a study on film production and risk, centred on Hollywood in the 1990s, applied economist Michael Pokorny utilizes economic portfolio management theory and summarizes his observations by stating that «success derives not so much from success on individual projects, but on the extent to which a range of products can be supported contemporaneously» (Pokorny 2005, p. 307). Additionally, he resolutely opposes the tendency of «[t]reating the risks associated with film production as a single-shot game in which the risk and revenue performance of films are analysed atomistically» (Pokorny, p. 277). This leads him to close his argument:

Therefore it is clear that size matters – effective risk spreading can only occur within the context of a relatively large portfolio of films. It is not surprising, therefore, that Hollywood is dominated by a small number of large distributors/studios, which, in turn, are generally parts of large integrated conglomerates – the risks involved in one-off film production would be otherwise unsustainable. (Pokorny, p. 307)

Pokorny’s assumptions are hence quite contrary to the practice of supporting individual film projects more or less irrespective of their company origin. Furthermore, without overtly saying so, an oligopoly, such as Hollywood is and the Swedish film industry used to be, is more or less suggested as a «natural» form of organization for a flourishing film production sector. In addition to Pokorny,
American economist Arthur De Vany, has, come to corresponding conclusions and argues that: «In the face of uncertainty that stems from each movie’s uniqueness and the wild behavior of audiences, a portfolio is one of the few ways a studio can mitigate its risk.» (De Vany 2003, p. 67).

A distinguishing tendency, furthermore, representative of the prevailing production condition, with its large dependency on public support and its vague financial incentives, may be termed deprofessionalization. This characteristic, in turn, may be observable and defined in various ways within different parts and on different levels with respect to the production environment as an aggregate entity.

With regard to film workers, it can be said to imply a situation where a majority of those active are unable to get fully employed or support themselves through audiovisual work and that: «[e]conomic support from one’s family and friends can form a vital resource in managing the small and irregular income flows» common to a sector «in which earnings levels in general remained very low» (Flisbäck 2011, p. 13).

On a slightly more elevated stage, among individuals who has ascended to «A-functions» such as writer, director and producer, a comparable form of propensity appear to be that very few opportunities to be continuously active, actually practising one’s craft, present themselves over time.

Within management and among financial support agencies, finally, it may be proposed that a somewhat similar state of affairs is present as well. With so many stakeholders from transnational, national, regional and local, most often public bodies, now inhabiting the support structure surrounding the audiovisual sphere, more specialist proficiency is perhaps demanded than can be supplied. At the same time, multiple and occasionally conflicting interests are frequently present. Intermittently, this situation produces sub-optimal conditions for the industry’s activity. Deprofessionalization can consequently be seen as a similar to Camre’s observation about the dismantling of a critical mass of experience.

In short, when introducing film subsidies in order to support national film production, but also to influence what kind of films were made and to some extent compete with the critical authority of the commercial industry, certain structures and procedures were implemented. Implicitly or not, these structures and procedures appear to somehow have undermined the conditions of existence for an effective, thriving and established production sector with more long-term perspectives. As film support continue to play a prominent part in European film production matters, the shaping and design of these mechanisms, consequently, must be further investigated, discussed and developed. Especially, since in addition to the one query I chose to pursue in this conclusion, a myriad of others could be listed and put under scrutiny.

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1 The idea of the ThinkTank appears to have been Henning Camre’s. He also served as its executive director. Camre is the former head of The National Film School of Denmark, the National Film and Television School in Britain as well as the Danish Film Institute. Since finishing the last stint, he has been concerned with questions regarding European film policy, an activity conducted through the ThinkTank. Some of what I came up with for the abovementioned report found its way unabridged into the report while other parts were revised or simply left out.
Harry Schein (1924–2006) is part of a group of Swedes whose reputation domestically is immense while he seems to remain almost unknown abroad. Typically, very little about him written in English exists. In Sweden, however, a large, beautifully illustrated coffee-table book about the man and his times was published and received much favourable comment in 2010. See Ilshammar, Snickars and Vesterlund (2010).

«Seemed» in this context must be emphasized. As far as the present author knows no in-depth investigation of what the actual, more detailed circumstances regarding how, for instance, much labour earned or how regularly they worked in the Swedish film industry of the 1930s through the 1950s exists. Accordingly, nothing remotely similar to anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker’s pioneering study of Hollywood during the heyday of the 1940s or the relevant parts of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1991) has appeared. Powdermaker, for her part, emphasize how precarious work was even at a time generally considered to be the high point of classical Hollywood. Regarding scriptwriters she concludes that no more than twenty percent of the members of the Screen Writer’s Guild was able to earn their living from writing for the movies in 1946 (Powdermaker 1951, p. 132). The brief description of Sweden in the present text is mainly assembled from assorted historical sources, figures related in a documentary film and what appears as related hearsay in these sources. The sources also contradict each other, giving various numbers regarding how many, for instance, were employed at a facility like Filmstaden. Also according to hearsay, Svensk Filminustri, the largest of the domestic vertically integrated companies, has closed its archives, not allowing scholars into the premises.

In the mid-2000s, a domestic discussion ensued regarding if too many films were produced, if they were «under-produced» and weather it was too easy for un-established film-makers to get support. As a result the SFI, from 2007 on, added a requirement that only «experienced» producers could apply. However, it is hard to say if this has really meant that a more limited and less fragmented production sector has surfaced.