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Scandinavian success as European policy dilemma

Creative Europe's funding for TV drama co-productions, 2014-20

This article surveys the fiction productions that received funding from Creative Europe's TV Programming scheme 2014-2020. The evaluation shows that most funding went to North-Western Europe with Scandinavia surpassing Europe's big TV producing nations. The geographical and genre imbalances in the TV scheme must be seen in the light of the long-established close collaboration between Germany and primarily the Scandinavian countries and the profiled position of "Nordic Noir" crime fiction as the engine that drives forward international collaboration. This trend exemplifies European policy dilemmas emerging from television's role in the intersections of economy and culture. North-European countries appear well-equipped in advance to meet the criteria of Creative Europe through established collaboration, while differences in the media systems and production cultures have kept producers in the South and East of Europe from even applying. The EU funding scheme may, thus, have strengthened already strong relationships rather than creating new ones.

Keywords: Creative Europe, media policy, co-production, TV crime series, TV funding

1 Introduction¹

This article evaluates Creative Europe's TV Programming Scheme (2014-2020) as a concrete European support instrument for a diverse and competitive European TV market. The programme supports TV productions with high potential for international circulation and a European dimension in their (co-)funding and -production constellations. The now concluded 2014-2020 TV scheme specifically aimed to "increase the capacity of audiovisual operators to develop European audiovisual works with a potential to circulate in the EU and beyond and to facilitate European and international co-production" by supporting the "production of TV programmes involving the participation of at least three European broadcasters" from three

¹ The research presented here has been financed by the research project *DETECT – Detecting Transcultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives* (Horizon 2020, 2018–2021) [Grant agreement number 770151], Various sections of this article have been previously published in deliverables of the Horizon 2020 project. The material was presented during the online conferences *Detecting Europe in Contemporary Crime Narratives* (June 2021) and *Nordmedia 2021* (August 2021). The article has been thoroughly revised, updated and adjusted for this publication.

countries with up to €1m (European Commission 2019).² Since the TV scheme was launched as a new initiative within the now concluded 2014-2020 Creative Europe programme, it appears timely to evaluate the funding decisions and effects of the TV scheme in the light of its stated goals and within the context of the European Union's support policies for the audiovisual industries.

This article evaluates how the TV Programming Scheme has achieved its policy goals during the funding round between 2014 and 2020 by considering the application and awards statistics for specially fiction productions, the supported co-production constellations and the productions' circulation. This research adds to our understanding of the current trends and dilemmas in European audiovisual policy by providing evidence that enables us to see how the fundamental tensions between national and supranational competency, economic and cultural goals, and unity and diversity materialise within the European support for enhanced distribution in the TV sector.

2 European cultural policy and the MEDIA programme

European audiovisual policy rests on two pillars: Media regulation of and financial support for the production and circulation of European audiovisual products (Crusafon 2015, 85). The former is illustrated by the Audiovisual Media Service Directive providing base-line regulation for the European market, such as the quota for European productions on broadcast TV or video on demand (VOD). The latter is exemplified by Creative Europe's MEDIA programme, which supports European film, TV and games industries through a variety of initiatives. Both pillars

² In the 2014-20 TV Programming Scheme, the maximum funding of € 1 million could be given to serial productions of at least 6 episodes, which exceed a production budget of € 10 million. Other drama and animation productions could be supported with a maximum of € 500,000 or 12.5% of their budgets. Documentaries could be supported with up to € 300,000 or 20% of the production budget (European Commission 2019, 4). In total 337 projects were funded over the 7-year period. The total of grants distributed was € 92,984,476.00. Of this grant total, 53 percent went to fiction productions.

of European audiovisual policy serve to achieve a dual and sometimes conflicting goal, i.e. strengthening the diversity and interconnectedness of European media culture and industries, whilst at the same time making the European audiovisual industry and its output competitive on the global market, particularly vis-à-vis the US-American entertainment industry. Balancing those goals has been an in-built struggle of European cultural politics ever since the EU sought to revise its public perception of the EU as a purely economic project through more culture-oriented initiatives in the 1980s (cf. Sassatelli 2002, 2009). Caroline Pauwels and Jan Loisen (2016) point to four major transformations in the EU's perspective on culture within its audiovisual politics, focusing on the tension between unity and diversity. In the early 1980s, the EU initially focussed on producing and using media to promote a shared European identity. In the late 1980s, then, the initial attention towards shared identity was subsumed by a celebration of cultural pluralism and focus on the circulation of (national) European works. In the early 1990s, the EU's competencies in the cultural sector were institutionalised in the Maastricht Treaty 1992 and the later Amsterdam Protocol, which together sought to manage the conflict between national and European levels of policy making by enshrining the subsidiarity principle with regards to culture. Since the mid-2000s, EU policy on audiovisual culture combines advocacy for cultural diversity on a global level (Pauwels and Loisen 2016, 156-157) with an economically driven movement towards internal deregulation of the digital media market and protectionism over European content producers against US-American media platforms (Broughton Micova et al. 2018).

The motto for European cultural policy that came with its institutionalisation in the 1990s and 2000s is “united in diversity” (Pauwels and Loisen 2016, 156), but as Schlesinger (2018, 24) points out, it is more of a “stock phrase” reflecting orthodox thinking rather than facilitating critical distance. Along the same lines, Monica Sassatelli refers to the motto as “a formal solution with no substance” (2015, 27). The subsidiarity principle's practical

implementation remains similarly challenging (cf. Loisen et al. 2013), not least because the general shift of cultural policy in the late 1990s/early 2000s from support for the Arts to boosting Creative Industries, increasingly blends economic, cultural and social goals. This means turning culture into an investment for economic growth, which (ideally) also achieves non-economic goals (Menger 2013). The 2004 enlargement of the European Union has further complicated how “unity in diversity” can work in media political practice, because the Eastern European member states also came with different interpretations as to where the line between culture and economy is drawn through media policy (De Smaele 2007) as well as a completely different media systemic heritage than the already diverse Western states (cf. Szczepanik 2018; Szczepanik et al. 2020).

A policy instrument that exemplifies many of the in-built tensions of European cultural policy is the MEDIA programme. Piloted in the late 1980s, it was officially launched in 1991 as a supporting instrument for the pre- and post-production of audiovisual works (primarily film), thereby supplementing the national funds’ production support (Pauwels and Loisen 2016, 159). MEDIA was established to increase the circulation of European works with a dual goal. On the one hand, it aimed to increase competitiveness of European film vis-à-vis the dominant US industry (Erickson and Dewey 2011, 494) and presented a first step towards a “single audiovisual market” (Schlesinger 2018, 15). But, on the other hand, the programme’s focus on fostering the circulation of film and TV also entails the cultural goal of a shared European destiny, if not identity (Schlesinger 2018, 15). The main tool employed by MEDIA was incentivising collaboration across borders (De Vinck and Pauwels 2018, 180) through, for example, co-productions. Other measures include audience building or funding for development. In 2014, MEDIA was integrated into Creative Europe to enhance cross-sector collaboration. This structural change and the 2014 programme’s growth and market-oriented

language (Bruell 2014, 22) highlight how the economic goals have become more prevalent as part of the programme's integration into a broader creative industries policy.

In comparison to national funds, the MEDIA programme has rather limited financial means.³ While highlighting that it has helped the networking of film professionals, De Vinck and Pauwels (2018, 176) argue that MEDIA has failed to fundamentally affect the structure of European film markets. Raats et al. (2018) see a reason for this limited effect in the more powerful national support mechanisms' focus on *national* production and distribution rather than the international distribution of film which MEDIA seeks to incentivise. Furthermore, they point out that larger markets have more diverse national policy tools that have helped to get them ahead of small and new member states in the distribution of their works (Raats et.al 2018, 203). In effect, large markets have been reported to have benefitted disproportionately from the MEDIA and Eurimages films funding (Pauwels and Loisen 2016, 160; referring to Schooneknaep and Pauwels 2014), casting doubt over the programme's role in effectively increasing the diversity of works circulating in the European market.

The policy dilemmas embedded in Europe's audiovisual policy can, however, neither be reduced to a simple opposition between unity vs. diversity or economic vs. cultural goals, nor can the general dilemmas of cultural policy⁴ sufficiently describe the goal conflicts inherent in the support for popular media in a globalising market. Therefore, we propose the following three dilemmas as guiding questions for the analysis of the TV Programming Scheme, as they are, at the same time, central to current debates within current European cultural policy. This article does not seek to give normative answers to these questions, but instead looks at how these dilemmas are handled in Creative Europe's current support practices.

³ At € 749 million, the entire budget for MEDIA 2007 for 32 countries over a period of seven years amounted to about the annual budget of the French film funding body CNC (Crusafon 2015, 91).

⁴ François Matarasso and Charles Landry (1999) have identified 21 dilemmas of cultural policy in Europe, such as heritage vs. the contemporary or public intervention vs. private activity. The unity/diversity and economy/culture dilemmas are implicit in their work, but not explicitly singled out.

1) Given constraints in the EU's cultural policies through the subsidiarity principle and limited funds in comparison to national schemes, should TV programming support be focused on efficacy by supporting well circulating works even if this means that funding goes to already nationally supported works? Or should it provide a counterbalance to the failures or gaps in the national/local schemes even if this comes at the expense of achieving the instrument's goals?

2) How do the audiovisual policy instruments balance the diversity of European media systems, production cultures and/or media ecologies of certain member states, on the one hand, with the goal of their integration and streamlining to increase external competitiveness on the global market, on the other?

3) Can a geographical imbalance in the distribution of European funds be justified by evidence of success on the global market, or should the programme strive towards fairness in the allocation of funds to support the diversity of European audiovisual products?

3 Method: EU's Common Frame in TV Funding

Interpreting the above-mentioned transnational intentions in the Creative Europe programme as related to the meta-narrative of the EU (the motto), provides an opportunity to assess the actual result and outcome of the complete 2014-20 programme. In this way, the programme is connected to what Sassatelli refers to as the “emplotment” of the imagined connectivity within the EU, i.e. “a specific way of connecting and justifying the coexistence of those narrative elements” that form “a common frame” (Sassatelli 2015, 31). The assessment of the outcome is done through what Karppinen and Moe (2019, 251) refer to as “public document analysis,” i.e. official documents freely available. By doing so the dataset collected is interpreted as indications of how the policy intentions behind the programme were met within specifically European TV funding practices and cultural policy.

Quantitative data on Creative Europe TV fiction funding was systematically collected through EACEA's website (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency). The 2014-20 scheme had two annual rounds of application. Thus, the main dataset for the evaluation of the TV scheme consists of a) 14 lists of "applications received by country" and b) 14 "lists of selected projects". Based on this information, the success rate of applications received from each country was calculated, including fiction, animation and documentaries. TV drama, as pointed out by Bondebjerg et. al. (2017, 30-35), has a privileged position in establishing "mediated cultural encounters" and establishing and challenging "social and cultural schemas," which also resonates in the profiled position serial TV fiction occupies among both broadcasters and VODs. Accordingly, a second dataset was made consisting of only fiction titles supported by the funding scheme, to inspect how specifically TV drama has been processed therein.

Each fiction programme was qualitatively evaluated and annotated according to available information regarding genre, nationality of the applying production company, co-producing countries, and primary filming locations. Such information was derived from credits, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), and production companies' genre qualifications. Additionally, samples of the data were amended by analysing specific programmes, including genre qualifying series, boosting the data quality further through information from original broadcasters, such as VOD paratexts. Consequently, our approach to genre rests within what Rich Altman (1999) refers to as a pragmatic approach to genre, which means that we predominantly annotate genres based on how genre categorisations are *used* (e.g. by IMDb or broadcasters), and not on a textual approach to genre traits. In the end, the fiction programmes co-funded by the Creative Europe TV scheme were broken down into six large, estimated genre categories: crime, history, drama, fantasy, comedy and other (including unavailable genre affiliations). Naturally, a number of the series – such as *Babylon Berlin* (2017-) – imply genre hybridity (here, predominantly a combination of crime and history), and in such cases the most

dominant genre was preferred. For instance, *Babylon Berlin* is most often referred to as a crime drama, subsuming historical drama as a dramatic backdrop to the narrative.

To contextualise the data from the TV Programming applications and awards statistics, various reports from the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) were employed. To evaluate the potential influence of the countries' media systemic differences, the local audience share of national public service institutions was listed, based on data from the report *The Internationalization of TV Audience Markets in Europe* (Schneeberger 2019). EAO reports on TV fiction production (Fontaine et al. 2018; Fontaine 2020; Fontaine and Jiminez Pumares 2020), the presence of European TV in VOD catalogues (Grece and Jiminez Pumares 2019) and on public film and TV funding (Talavera Milla et al. 2016) provided the basis for evaluating the level of alignment between the TV scheme's evaluation criteria and the production landscapes and distribution patterns of the countries receiving most grants. Finally, our analysis of the TV funding scheme was evaluated by European policy makers in online interview and feedback sessions.⁵

4 Geographical Distribution: A North-European Bias

Our analysis of the TV Programming Scheme's statistics shows that three quarters of the total grants awarded went to only five territories: France, Denmark, the UK, Germany and Sweden (see figure 1). These are, at the same time, also the territories with the highest numbers of applications, although their success rates vary (the average success rate is 35%). In the period, France, Germany and the UK were the biggest TV producing countries in the EU, accounting together for 60% of the nearly 1.000 fiction titles produced per year between 2015 and 2018

⁵ This includes online interviews with and feedback from Ene Katrine Rasmussen (Head of Office of Creative Europe Desk, Denmark), and an online feedback session with Matteo Solaro (Head of Sector TV Programming), Magdalena Dzbik (Policy Officer, Creative Europe Programme, Media Policy, AV sector support), Emmanuel Joly (Senior Expert, Audiovisual Industry and Media Support Programmes) and Jolien Willemsens (Head of sector for Development, MEDIA subprogramme, Creative Europe).

(Fontaine 2020, 18). Sweden produced on average 24 titles per year during the period (Fontaine 2020, 18), while Denmark produced 8 TV fiction titles in 2017 (Fontaine et al. 2018, 19). Sweden and Denmark are, thus, countries with medium or low production capacity, whose applications received five extra points in the evaluation for the programming scheme to support production in these countries.

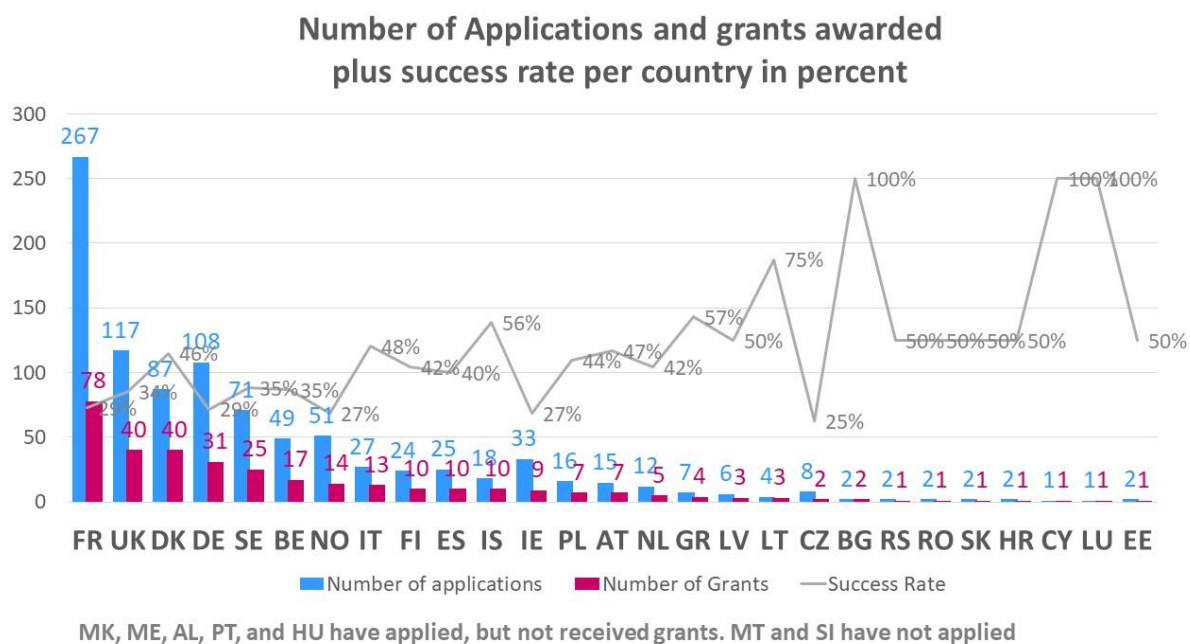


Figure 1: Total number of applications and grants awarded for the TV Programming Scheme per country (fiction, documentary and animation).

The five countries that received most of the total grants (including documentary and animation) were also the countries whose productions circulated best on streaming services in 2019: 82% of European fiction titles on Subscription VOD (SVOD) services available in the EU in 2019 came from the UK, France, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. The cases of Denmark and Sweden show that this popularity is not merely a reflection of production capacity, since the small Scandinavian countries (DK/SE/NO) together provided 5% of EU SVOD titles, while Germany, the country with the highest production capacity, accounted for only 9% (Grece and Jiminez Pumares 2019, 83). From this point of view, the TV Programming scheme sufficiently

addressed the difference in production capacities between Europe's large and small nations. The five countries which received most of the TV programming scheme's grants were also the most avid European participants in co-productions beyond the linguistic regions. Together they accounted for nearly 60% of the non-linguistic co-productions of 2-13 episode series produced in the EU between 2015 and 2018 (Fontaine 2020, p. 23).

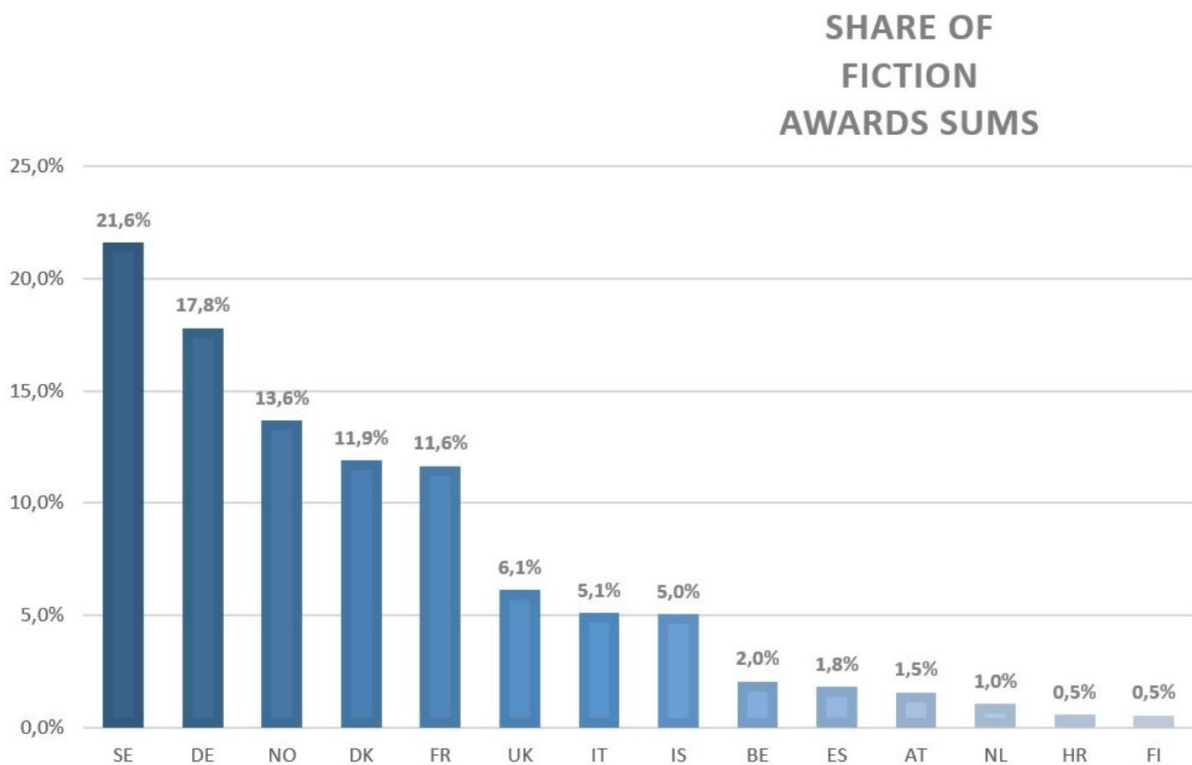


Figure 2: Distribution of fiction award sums in the TV Programming scheme (2014-2020).

If we look specifically at the top four receivers of funding for TV fiction in the TV scheme, we find that the three Scandinavian countries Norway, Sweden and Denmark plus Germany take home no less than 65% of the fiscal share and 61% of the grants in total (see figure 2 and table 1). Such a dominant bias towards only four North-European countries indicates that the success-rate, rather than policy success of Creative Europe, needs an explanation that has to do with already existing production ecologies and pre-established

creative affinities among the four countries, an argument we return to below. In fact, if we include TV fiction funding for Iceland and Finland, the Nordic cluster (DK/SE/NO + FI/IS) by itself is strongly represented by taking home 53% of the total funding for TV fiction programming in Creative Europe (both in grant and fiscal share).

Country	Award €	No. of awards	Fiscal share		FR, DE, SE, DK, NO
Austria (AT)	750,000	2	1.5%	Top 5:	37,695,000
Belgium (BE)	1,000,000	2	2.0%	Fiscal share:	76%
Croatia (HR)	260,000	1	0.5%	Top 5 grants:	55
Denmark (DK)	5,850,000	10	11.9%	Grant share:	66%
Finland (FI)	255,347	1	0.5%		
France (FR)	5,730,000	9	11.6%		DE, SE, DK, NO
Germany (DE)	8,760,000	14	17.8%	Top 4:	31,965,000
Iceland (IS)	2,471,824	6	5.0%	Fiscal share:	65%
Italy (IT)	2,500,000	3	5.1%	Top 4 grants:	51
Norway (NO)	6,725,000	8	13.6%	Grant share:	61%
Spain (ES)	871,552	3	1.8%		
Sweden (SE)	10,630,000	19	21.6%		NORDICS (DK, SE, NO, IS, FI)
The Netherlands (NL)	500,000	1	1.0%	Total finance:	25,932,171
United Kingdom (UK)	3,000,000	4	6.1%	Fiscal share:	53%
SUM	49,303,723	83	100.0%	Grant share:	53%

Table 1: Sums, numbers and shares of fiction grants awarded for the TV Programming Scheme per country (fiction only).

The Scandinavian territories (DK, SE, NO) have been awarded nearly half (47%) of the €50m for high-end fiction distributed through the programme (€23.2m). This accounts for more funding than the big three fiction producers (DE, FR, UK), which altogether received €17.5m of support. This points towards a striking success of the Scandinavian TV industry when it comes to securing European funding, suggesting that Scandinavian productions were particularly well aligned with the cultural and economic goals behind the TV Programming scheme in general and the Creative Europe project as a whole. The bias in the programme towards the Nordics and Germany is obvious in the funding distribution, and as shown below,

this is tied to decades of regional collaboration and generic affinities with especially the international success of Nordic Noir.

Our network analysis of the co-productions funded by Creative Europe, however, also shows that new co-production constellations have emerged in the lifetime of the 2014-20 programme (see figure 3). Nordic countries no longer just benefit from the Scandinavian-German co-productions, which have been common practice since the early 1990's (Jensen, Nielsen and Waade 2016; Hansen and Waade 2017). The TV Programming scheme may also have been involved in bringing France to the table with co-productions like the Swedish-French *Midnight Sun* (2016), the Danish-French *DNA* (2019) and the Icelandic-French *Blackport* (2021). Together with European co-funding, such co-productions bring additional capital into the Nordic TV business and raise the series' production value and visibility on the international market, while also broadening the scope of transnational stories told, ideally benefiting a European sense of transnational identity and solidarity (Bengesser 2019). Concerning the pole position of France in both number of applications and share of total grants (including documentary and animation), France appears to possess the network and financial resources to enter closer collaboration with the stronger partners in the funding programme. Essentially, the new production affinities with the Nordic region substantiate France as part of the big-5 in Creative Europe's TV fiction funding (cf. figure 2).

Other countries have been present in the scheme, but collaborated only on the fringes of the Scandinavian-Central European or French-Nordic co-production cluster. Those connections outside the two clusters can be described as "occasional affinities", to highlight their status as co-productions on an ad-hoc basis rather than following established patterns. The reasons for the under-representation of production companies in Southern and Eastern Europe in the overall scheme, as well as those for the strength of Scandinavian and German players in fiction (co-)production are the focus of the following sections.

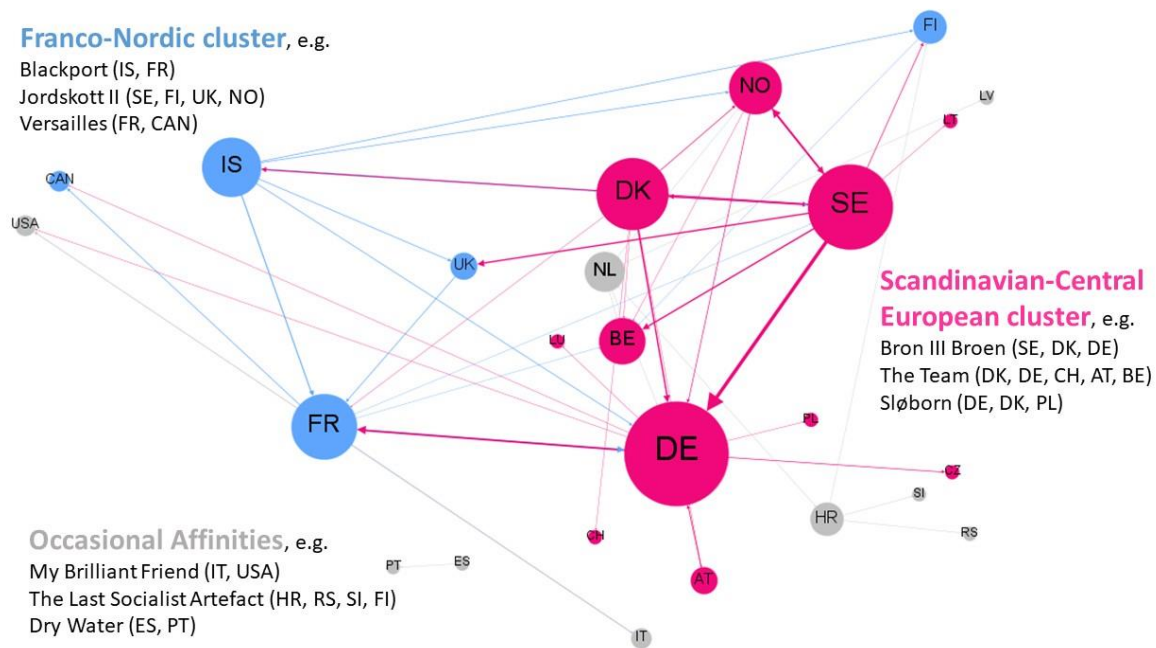


Figure 3: Network of co-production events (fiction) supported by the TV programming scheme (2014-2020) showing the clear dominance by well-established clusters in Scandinavia and in the Nordics with Germany, an emerging cluster between the Nordics and France, and various occasional collaboration that may develop into future clusters.

5 Missed Opportunities and the Absence of Eastern Europe

The dominance of France, Germany, the UK, Denmark and Sweden implies that other countries did not receive support from the TV programming scheme to the same degree. Spain and Italy, for example, are also popular countries of origin in European SVOD catalogues. Spain is, in fact, a booming producer of internationally popular TV series. It has achieved broad international attention with series like *La casa de papel* (2017-), and investment in Spanish TV series has risen sharply since 2015. In 2019, Spain produced 40 high-end series (Fontaine and Jimenez Pumares 2020, pp. 51–54). Yet only 10 of the 337 grants from the complete TV programming scheme have gone towards Spanish production companies, and less than €1m went towards Spanish fiction productions. This imbalance was not due to the quality of their proposals, since the Spanish applications achieved a slightly above average success rate of 40%,

but due to a lack of applications, as Spain only accounted for 2,6% of the applications. Discussing the above evaluation of the TV scheme, Ene Katrine Rasmussen from the Creative Europe Desk Denmark stressed that an external reason may explain the lack of Spanish applications:

Like in Spain, Netflix has really drained the industry. That is also a reason why we haven't seen so many Spanish applications in the last years because the whole Spanish production environment has been bought up by Netflix. So, why apply for TV Programming when you can get full financing from Netflix? (Bengesser, Hansen 1/14/2021)

The reasons for the lack of applications may, in part, stem from media systemic differences, but a production environment with a strong presence by Netflix, like in the Spanish creative sector, clearly transforms the production ecology of a strong TV fiction territory, apparently with direct consequences for European collaboration through Creative Europe. Media systemic differences, though, becomes very clear in relation to Eastern European territories.

The volume of fiction production in the Eastern European markets is comparable to the small Scandinavian nations.⁶ In contrast to the Nordic countries, though, the Eastern European TV producers have not benefited from an international appeal of “Nordic Noir” or the British dominance on the European TV market, limiting their potential for circulation. We also see Eastern Europe underrepresented in the applications to the scheme, though this region's creative industries would instigate obvious application opportunities, because many Eastern countries were classified as low production capacity industries which received extra points in the evaluation. Among the fiction productions supported by the TV programming scheme, however, only one of the applying beneficiary production companies was located in Eastern

⁶ Data from Fontaine et al. (2018) refers to the number of fiction titles produced in 2017: SE 28, DK 8; CZ 26, RO 9, HU 9. Poland produced 49 titles, which is on par with the production of the Netherlands (46).

Europe: Zagreb-based Kinorama, which received support for *The Last Socialist Artefact* in the 2014-20 scheme's ultimate funding round.

Reasons for the lack of Eastern European applications may be found in the different traditions for funding projects and distributing rights. According to the guidelines of the TV funding scheme, the “exploitation rights licensed to the broadcasters participating in the production have to revert to the producer after a maximum license period of [...] 7 years if the broadcaster's participation takes the form of a pre-sale; 10 years if the broadcaster's participation also takes the form of a co-production” (European Commission 2019). Few private broadcasters follow these guidelines. This may also explain why there are only few grants involving localised global streaming services, such as HBO, since retaining exclusivity of (local) content is a core element of their strategy for attracting subscribers. In Eastern Europe, HBO instigated linear TV already in the 1990s, and has since had a privileged commissioning position in the region's TV industries (Imre 2018; Hansen et.al 2021).

An additional reason for the lack of Eastern European co-producing partners may be more historic and economic. Historically, there are great differences between the decade-long evolution of media environments in the North-European public service-oriented media cultures and the private economies of post-socialist territories. At the same time, there are significant internal differences between the Eastern European media markets, which means that the same natural affinities between broadcasters across borders do not exist to the same level as in the Nordics. While Czech TV production, for example, depends largely on (still scarce) public funding (Szczepanik 2018), the Romanian high-end TV industry depends on the transnationally active services like HBO (Bengesser and Keszeg 2020; Hansen et al. 2021). Different general economic systems and production costs for TV production also creates differences that influence ways of collaboration. The low-priced workforce establishes new opportunities for local production services, attracting foreign production to Eastern territories, which may create

local talent development and potentially local production hubs and future co-productions. In Hungary, for example, HBO's local productions have inspired and enabled further domestic high-quality series (Hansen et al. 2021), but the experience with run-away film productions in Prague suggests limited spill-over effects and up-ward mobility of local creatives (Szczepanik 2016).

Although Eastern European applications across the scheme and funding success in the fiction support are scarce, we see Poland and the Czech Republic, connected to the Central-European-Scandinavian network through Germany, but not as main applicants. Instead, they were present in the productions supported by the TV programming scheme as production services, locations or settings. The Danish-French *DNA* or the German *Das Boot* (2018-), for example, were partly been filmed in the Czech Republic. Co-production with Czech partners is a means to access cheaper production resources on location and additional funding through the Czech tax incentive, which also supported the German-French-Canadian co-production *Shadowplay* (2020-). The German-Danish pandemic thriller *Sløborn* (2020-) was partly filmed in Poland, with the Polish city Sopot standing in for the coastal border region between Germany and Denmark. These cases are exemplary for Eastern European locations serving as substitutes for cities or landscapes in Western Europe.

While such funding constellations concur with the TV scheme's evaluation criterion of a European dimension in the funding, they are nonetheless problematic. First, the use of Eastern European locations as substitutes for other places means that there is little recognisability that can be translated in follow-on business, like screen tourism. More importantly though, there is a risk that the TV programming scheme missed the opportunity to support stories from Eastern European territories, which have been on the rise not only as a filming location but also as a setting for crime stories like the Czech *Mamon* (2015), the Romanian *Valea mută* (2016) or the Hungarian *Aranyélet* (2015-18). These examples integrated narrative and aesthetic traits from

the internationally successful Nordic Noir stories, but transposed them for locations, societies and cultures of Eastern Europe (Bengesser, Hansen and Gemzøe 2020). These HBO stories illustrate the potential to expand and diversify TV-narratives of Europe.

Therefore, we can conclude that the lack of Southern and Eastern European fiction productions in the TV scheme's portfolio is not due to a lack of relevant high-quality productions. On the contrary, high-end fiction production, booming in Spain and Eastern Europe, has increasingly become a showcase for shared European narrative and aesthetic qualities. Instead, there is evidence that the funding and production structures in the South-Eastern markets make them incompatible with some of the pre-requisites for applying to the TV programming scheme. On the one hand, this is due to local production currently driven by globally operating SVODs producing exclusive local content. On the other hand, this is due to a more fundamental lack of co-funding or export orientation.⁷

6. TV Crime Series as Transcultural Communication: *The Team*

In addition to the geographical imbalance in the distribution of Creative Europe's TV funds, a genre slant can be detected. There is a clear predilection for crime narratives in the funding system, indicating that crime narratives imbue qualities that efficiently service TV-drama as occurrences of transcultural communication.⁸ However, it may be unwarranted to give the Creative Europe programme as such credit for the transnational circulation implied in the funding scheme's evaluation criteria. When the scheme was published, a Scandinavian-German

⁷ More individual reasons relating to the capacity of production companies from Southern and Eastern Europe to apply for the EU scheme have not been examined here. Local Creative Europe desks, according to our informant Ene Katrine Rasmussen, are actively promoting the scheme to independent producers in the region.

⁸ The international appeal of the crime genre has been researched by a wide range of scholars, including Hansen and Waade (2017), Bondebjerg et al. (2017), and Hansen, Peacock and Turnbull (2018). The assumption of a wide transcultural appeal of crime narratives was a built-in feature of the research project DETECt (2018-21), including the official report on transnational VOD platforms (Antoniazzi and Barra 2021). "For television, crime drama [...] is clearly the most popular genre across Europe" (Bondebjerg et al. 2017, 223).

production cluster stood ready with an overall production ecology that fitted the scheme very well. We will return to this argument below.

First, we briefly dwell with the idea of TV crime series as transcultural communication, as this is the main extra-economic objective of or ideal ambition in the EU's cultural funding system. In the Creative Europe programme – in general, and not just the TV scheme – this is rooted in what is often referred to as “the European added-value” in evaluation criteria. Such added value is more precisely defined as increased border crossing of cultural products. The official 2018 evaluation of the Creative Europe programme defined “European added-value” in this way, while also acknowledging or, at least, indicating the geographical bias analysed above:

The programme contributes to developing cross-border cooperation and its European added value is visible. However, the dominance of several Member States among the main beneficiaries (coordinators of projects) is noticeable, e.g. in TV programming, international co-production funds or European cooperation projects. (Zygierewicz 2018, 41)

Most importantly, then, a European dimension in Creative Europe's funding for creative and cultural industries is manifest in how well projects co-funded by the programme travel across and beyond the continent. The motivation driving such circulation is cultural awareness across nations and cultures, hence ideally becoming acts of communication that “promote differences that *transcend* various traditional cultures” (Hepp 2015, 3). This article is not the place to critically scrutinise how such communication takes place. Rather, the point is that ‘transcending individual cultures’ is an ideal that policymakers of the EU strive towards.

The second season of *The Team* (2015-18) appears in the dataset and, in many ways, serves as the perfect example of the idealism implied in the scheme. In production, it involved five different European producers and seven European broadcasters, these from seven different European countries. The series tells the story in six different languages about three local detective teams investigating international border crossing crime through close transnational

collaboration. Upon release of the first season, the former EBU Media Director, Annika Nyberg Frankenhaeuser (2012-15), said:

This exciting new crime series shows that television, like the Eurovision Song Contest, can help bring Europeans together. Series like *Borgen* brought global acclaim and showed that language is no barrier to the international success of 'Made in Europe' fiction and *The Team* adds something new to the mix. It is the first genuine 'European' series of its kind. (Banks 2015).

The Eurovision Song Contest is a show that, at its highest, achieves over 200 million viewers in and beyond Europe. In relation to transcultural communication, Frankenhaeuser's equation of the Song Contest and a TV series, however, essentially mixes two different regimes of judgment; rather than aesthetic judgment normally associated with TV series, Frankenhaeuser transposes TV series to what Hepp refers to as the "communicative figurations" normally associated with "media events" (Hepp 2015, 178). Although the cultural blend of *The Team* was criticised as Europudding (Redvall 2020, 140; cf. Jacquelin 2021), the policy agenda implied in Frankenhaeuser's evaluation of *The Team*'s potential speaks directly into the similar interest in creating transculturality across European borders through mutual communicative relationships. In the same interview, Frankenhaeuser even highlights that there is "a solid history of co-production in the [crime] genre", which links the level of transculturality EU policymakers strive towards in TV Programming with Creative Europe's predilection for Nordic-German crime series.

7 Policy Predilection for the Crime Genre from the Nordic-German Cluster

In the period 2014-20, the TV scheme co-funded 83 seasons of TV series in total, among which no less than 44 are TV crime series. Firstly, this displays a comparatively strong difference from the genres represented in the European feature film funding opportunities, where crime plays a diminutive role (Baschiera and Schleich 2021). Secondly, the crime genre has been highlighted as the genre that is easiest to co-produce (Bondebjerg et al. 2017, 251; Hansen 2020,

91). The genre appears to embrace a range of traits that may work well in stories transcending internally European geographical boundaries, including crimes and detectives trespassing borders both within and beyond the European continent like, for instance, *The Team*. The result is, then, that when the calls in the TV scheme ask specifically for “the European dimension”, implying potential to co-produce and travel internationally, the crime genre seems to come with advantages in its semantics. As we see a general dominance of the crime genre across the European continent, however, one question appears prevalent: Why do we see such a dominance from only four to five countries in the TV funding scheme, if crime is an all-pervading popular international genre? To reply to this, we delve deeper into Frankenhaeuser’s reference to the long prehistory of co-production within the genre.

ESTIMATED GENRE AFFILIATION

■ Crime ■ History ■ Drama ■ Fantasy ■ Comedy ■ Other

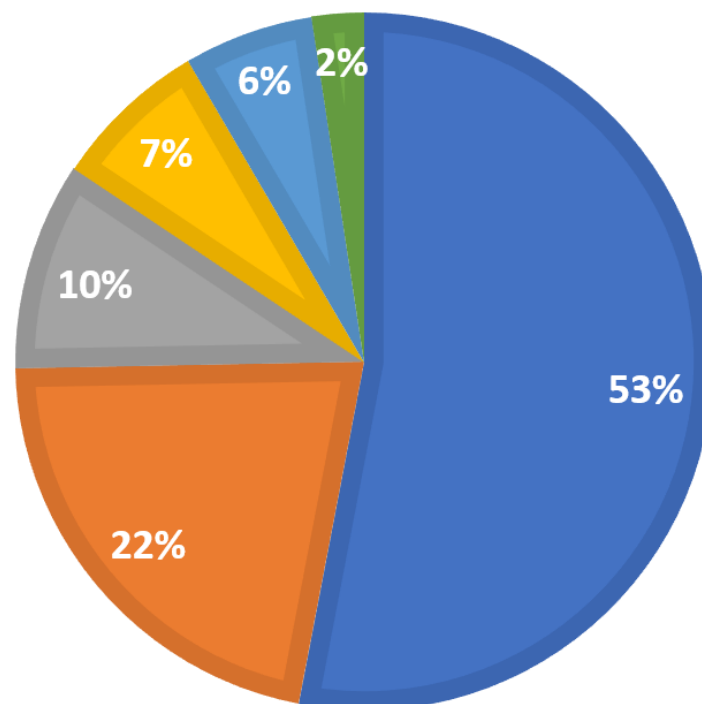


Figure 4: Genre affiliation of the fiction productions supported by the TV programming scheme (2014-2020).

The leading position of the Nordic countries and Germany originates from decades of co-production, co-funding and pre-buy relationships among each other. Through both Nordvision and The Nordic Film and TV Fund, the Nordic countries have an institutionalised co-production relationship. Moreover, the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish languages share similar linguistic features making them mutually understandable, although co-production between the three countries is not regarded linguistic co-production in EAO-data (Fontaine 2020). As highlighted by Hansen and Waade (2017), German co-funding has been instrumental in boosting the production value of especially Danish and Swedish crime dramas as well as their international distribution. This was instigated in the early 1990's in the Swedish-German collaboration on six adaptations of novels by the quintessential Swedish crime writers Sjöwall and Wahlöö, including collaboration between broadcasters SVT in Sweden and RTL in Germany. This continued in a range of collaborations with especially German public service broadcaster ZDF on the *Beck* series (1997-), the Emmy-award winning series *The Eagle* (2004-6), and the very important role played by ZDF Enterprises in the world-wide distribution of the Danish series *The Killing* (2007-12). The *Wallander* series (2005-13) was co-produced with ARD Degeto, the production arm of Germany's other public service broadcaster. Public service broadcasters as majority TV-producers (the Danish non-commercial PSB DR and the Swedish commercial PSB TV4 in the cases above) are ideal co-production partners because their focus on serving national audiences means that they are not in direct competition with each other on the global market. Essentially, internal collaboration within the Nordic region has a decade-long prehistory since the 1950s, whilst the German connection in especially Nordic TV crime series cannot be underestimated.

When we reach the 2014-20 Creative Europe programme, this clearly influences the funding results in the TV scheme. Here, Nordic-German co-production took place in almost

one in every four fiction titles supported (23%). Either among the Nordic countries or by including German collaboration, the required collaboration between at least three countries in the 2014-20 scheme seems almost ‘mechanical’ in accessing funding from the TV programme. Therefore, the Nordic-German cluster appears as the strongest in the network of co-productions supported by the TV programming scheme (cf. figure 3), because the production ecology and the already established creative relationships between the countries fitted the policy of the TV programming scheme very well.

Judging from the position of the Scandinavian countries in the funding scheme and the popularity of the genre it may be less surprising that the crime genre takes home over half of the funding for TV fiction in the TV Programming Scheme. Interestingly enough, when Germany is awarded fiction funding as a majority producer, the genre affinity is most often historical drama, often tied directly to World War II and the Cold War. Though, when Germany appears as a producer of crime narratives in the dataset, they are regularly a minority co-producer or broadcaster on Nordic crime series. On the one hand, this is based on the long history of what eventually becomes the international attention towards Nordic Noir. On the other, it tells an interesting story about the important hidden role played by Germany in the international propagation of Nordic Noir – and how Creative Europe may have ended up strengthening already strong transnational production ecologies in the period 2014-20.

There are at least three interconnected reasons for the Scandinavian success, which serve as a general explanation of why Scandinavian production cultures appeared well-aligned with the policy goals behind Creative Europe: a) The Scandinavian production culture matches the goal of supporting the independent production industry through favourable rights agreements that redistribute power from broadcasters and VOD services to independent producers. b) Due to the institutionalised co-production relationships between Nordic (and German) partners, it is easy for projects to showcase that they have eligible participation from different countries at an

early production stage. c) The Scandinavian productions have a track-record of circulating well on the European market, filling VOD catalogues and being recognizable through distinct genre traits, aesthetics or at least the branding power of Nordic Noir (Hills 2017; Creeber 2015), which resonates with audiences across the globe (Jensen and Jacobsen 2020).⁹ Looking at this alignment of the Nordic production models and TV culture with Creative Europe's goal of securing wide circulation within Europe and on the global market, supporting more Nordic Noir crime series appears justified, since the titles have attracted attention in European and global catalogues. By supporting these productions, the TV programming scheme effectively takes a role as a reinforcement of existing North-Western European production practices, network structures and cultural trends behind, what Schlesinger (2018, 18) calls, still only a "modest counterflow to both the national and the American dominance in transnational European television".

While this situation has allowed the TV programming scheme to achieve its goal of supporting productions with distribution potential (based on the preceding achievements of Nordic Noir), markets which are not aligned with these cultures have effectively been excluded from European support. Thereby, the scheme only achieved limited success in broadening co-production networks and the pool of representations of European cultures that circulate within and beyond the EU. This situation, however, cannot simply be understood as a conflict between economic vs. cultural policy or national vs. European goals. Rather, it exposes dynamic variations and re-combinations of the dilemmas of unity/diversity, national/European and cultural/economic. The final part of the article scrutinises these reconfigured dilemmas.

⁹ Additional reasons for the success may be found in the local support structures for applicants to EU schemes, such as the Creative Europe Desk at the Danish Film Institute, which has sustained experience in advising Danish applicants and has widely promoted the TV Programming scheme (Bengesser and Hansen 2021b).

8 Reconfigured European Policy Dilemmas

Exploring the EU's role in relation to national cultural policy, we see the EU support reinforcing national and sub-European transnational policies such as the Nordic cooperation and, in fact, also Eastern European policies keen on attracting foreign investment. While no inherent conflict between EU and national policy emerges, the actual *lack* of conflict may be the fundamental problem. We do not see European policies counter-balancing trends in national cultural policy that appear problematic from a European point of view: Firstly, this lack of balance regards the inadequate integration across the East-West divide when it comes to co-production and the limited circulation of narratives. Secondly, we see an emergent dependence of certain regions' production cultures on private, non-EU investment (e.g. from Netflix). Such dependence ensues the risks of being unsustainable from an economic point of view and, from a cultural point of view, it may be limiting the diversity of representations that are being produced and circulated. Lastly (and most problematically) it indicates an incompatibility of European cultural policy with the diversity of Europe's media systems. While reinforcing existing production practices, co-production structures and representational trends appear justified from the point of view of a policy's efficacy and cost-effectiveness, but it remains problematic if one expects fairness in the distribution of funds or looks at European cultural support as an agent of change both from an economic as well as a cultural point of view.

The cases of Spain and Eastern Europe have shown that Creative Europe may be missing out on new market trends. Of course, it can be argued that supporting more Netflix productions in Spain or the pronounced presence of the US-player HBO runs against the idea of developing European competition against global operation of US giants. But by calling for European dimensions in the funding and narratives, the programming scheme exerts power in shaping projects according to cultural goals, such as creating on-screen representations of European collaboration, identity and transnational culture, as well as to economic goals, e.g. supporting

independent production. If certain areas of Europe are de facto shut out of the funding, their production landscape cannot be affected by such policy ‘nudges’ towards the intended ideals of Europeaness behind and in front of the camera.

From 2014-20, the scheme has mostly supported fiction productions with a track-record of internationally renowned quality, successful international distribution, and fruitful collaboration, officiously provided by the Nordic Noir series founded on the genre’s long prehistory. On the one hand, one could argue that copious funding from the European scheme and the prestige attached to it have helped to secure the sustainability of the Nordic production model. This point is supported by the evidence that the TV scheme also helped broaden co-production networks beyond Nordic-German collaboration in, for instance, bringing closer collaboration with France. On the other hand, the funding preferences for Nordic Noir work against the idea of supporting diversity in European (TV) cultures, in terms of who produces, what is being produced and ultimately what circulates across borders. In addition, the overrepresentation of crime narratives can be criticised from the point of view of a cultural policy that seeks to promote a diversity of cultural output, while an economic perspective justifies this slant towards crime, since it is the genre that circulates best across Europe.

The points system in favour of countries with low production capacities suggested that the 2014-20 scheme aimed to raise production capacities across the continent, and thereby to contribute to the development of Europe’s many smaller audiovisual markets, which are particularly at risk in the context of a globalizing TV market (McElroy et al. 2018), as well as to work towards an integration of Europe’s digital peripheries into the (envisioned) digital single market (Szczepanik et al. 2020). With regards to the small Scandinavian markets, this has clearly happened, but the Eastern European markets with low and medium production capacities have not received support. One could argue, once again, that this is justified because the small Scandinavian producers are best positioned to fulfil the policy goals of the TV scheme.

At the same time, the case can be seen as an unfair distribution of support, because the European money remains in North-Western Europe.

The question of geographical (im-)balance becomes even more salient when looking at levels of public support for film and TV. Until now, we see that countries with healthy national support structures for creative industries, particularly France and to some extent the Scandinavian territories with high GDPs (Talavera Milla et al. 2016, 35), are overrepresented in the list of producers who receive European support (Baschiera and Schleich 2021). In fact, such productions are not only EU-supported, but also funded by (often public) stakeholders on local, national or regional levels. While this showcases that the European scheme is not in conflict or competition with local and national funders, it nonetheless raises the question if double or even triple funding is justified, particularly if it ends up predominantly supporting well established structures such as the Nordic-German co-production network. In the audiovisual sector, though, European support schemes are still miniscule in comparison to other areas of EU activity (Schlesinger 2018, 15) and remain far behind the volumes of financial support given on the national level (Crusafon 2015). Thus, Creative Europe and its funding schemes can only ever play a supplementary role in the support for the audiovisual industries, in line with the Maastricht Treaty's definition of its role in relation to national culture(s).

This default scarcity of European funding can lead to two different scenarios: Either one argues that the limited funds should be spent on the productions with the highest potential of achieving the policies' goals, which they are if spent on additional crime shows from well-established production cultures, resulting in boosted budgets by institutionalised co-production and readily available national and local public support. Or one argues that EU funding should achieve goals distinct from what is already part of national or regional support systems, such as pushing for closer collaboration between Eastern and Western Europe.

9 Conclusion

The evaluation of the 2014-2020 TV programming scheme contributes to our understanding of how tensions materialise within a European cultural policy that seeks to balance internal integration with the external competitiveness of European audiovisual works. These are predominantly conflicting interests between unity and diversity, cultural and economic policies, and national and European levels of agency. In the case of Creative Europe's support for TV productions, we see a scheme that has decidedly European goals, for example in increasing transnational cooperation in the funding of TV programmes. Scandinavian crime productions showcase how these goals can be achieved in accordance with national public service and creative industries support policies. The success of small Nordic countries also challenges the dominance of the big countries that has been detected in EU level film funding (Schoonekaemp and Pauwels 2014). Still, it appears to remain that elaborate national funding toolboxes, which Raats et.al (2018) identified as a pathway to EU funding success for film, also help TV producers get ahead on the European level. The institutionalised Nordic collaboration through Nordvision has been instrumental in assembling the transnational co-production and –funding patterns desired by the TV Programming Scheme. At the same time, the lack of applications and funding success outside North-Western Europe highlights that such national/regional policies and practices aimed at supporting independent production and regional co-production, seem to be a priori for enabling the achievement of European goals, thereby effectively excluding production cultures that do not follow this pattern.

The overrepresentation of crime series and Nordic productions throughout the 2014-20 TV scheme suggests a position of European funding as mainly a reinforcement of pre-existing accomplishments, both in cultural and economic terms (although the support for the first Eastern European fiction production indicates potential change). Still, the fiscal limitation of European funding might make it unfeasible to expect this single instrument to affect change in

production patterns. If its role is reinforcement of existing success, however, we must consider that the main receivers of the European funds have so far also come from nationally well-supported creative industries.

From a pragmatic point of view, the exclusion of Southern and Eastern partners has not necessarily had negative effects on achieving the policy goal of successful circulation of European works, but it has impeded the geographical reach of this specific instrument outside North-Western Europe. The programme has, therefore, precluded cultural effects on a diversification of images of European identities (particularly regarding their expansion beyond pathways of cultural proximities), and potential economic effects on the way local and regional creative industries adapt to the transformation from broadcast to streaming.

Looking at the efficacy of the instrument, we see that success in circulation has been achieved, but at the expense of regional diversity. As shown above, this appears to be a knock-on effect from the way application criteria were set rather than a deliberate exclusion. Nevertheless, its funding decisions evidence the TV scheme to be in line with the tendency identified by Menger (2013) and Schlesinger (2018), namely a European cultural industries policy that emphasises the economic goals more than dimensions of European identity-formation through media exposure. Concretely, the choices in the distribution of funds put economic efficacy before extra-economic goals such as a diversification of representations.

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