EUROPEAN FILM AND TELEVISION CO-PRODUCTION

Policy and Practice

Edited by
Julia Hammett-Jamart
Petar Mitric
Eva Novrup Redvall

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Palgrave European Film and Media Studies
ISBN 978-3-319-97156-8 ISBN 978-3-319-97157-5 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97157-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018952457

Cover illustration: Film still from Europa (1991), courtesy of Zentropa
Cover design: Fatima Jamadar

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Foreword

In a Europe of many nations, cultures and languages, a Europe of great diversity but also great fragmentation, co-production and transnational networks seem to be the way ahead. Looking back on the history of the treaties, institutions and initiatives in Europe and the EU clearly tells us that. The idea of transnational networks goes through all treaties in the history of the EU from 1957 and onwards, even though culture was not central in the early years and no real instrumental policies were developed (Bondebjerg 2016). However, the idea gradually grows into a central cultural policy concept with the development of Eurimages, the MEDIA programmes and in an even more concrete way, in the *European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production* (COE 1992). Here co-production is seen as "an instrument of creation and expression of cultural diversity on a European scale" and even as a "new driving force" (COE 1992: Preamble).

The shaping of creative, transnational European networks gradually became an agenda not only for cinematographic and television production but also as part of a wider and more general increase in focus on culture and cultural encounters as a part of the European project. In the period leading up to the launch in 2014 of the ambitious new cultural programme *Creative Europe*, the EU also tried to involve leading intellectuals and artists in a project called *New Narrative for Europe* (2014). Here we find expressions that go beyond and much further than the normal cultural policy praxis of the EU:

> Europe is a state of mind formed and fostered by its spiritual, philosophical, artistic and scientific inheritance, and driven by lessons of history. It must now become a genuine and effective political body that has the ability and sensibility to rise to all challenges and difficulties that European citizens are facing today and will face tomorrow (…) Europe is a source of inspiration from the past, it is emancipation in the present, and an aspiration towards a sustainable future. Europe is an identity, and idea, an ideal. (European Commission 2014)

The idea of European cultural networks is thus inscribed in a broader cultural context and the documents in fact point towards the idea that national and transnational narratives in Europe can create cultural encounters, which can again change our concept of the societies and the Europe we live in. Co-production then, at one end is about establishing institutional frameworks for transnational creative work, and at the other end has a deeper cultural function. The unity in diversity so often mentioned in European documents is only an everyday reality for people living in Europe if they encounter this diversity on their national screens.

Visions, Realities and Challenges

The launch of Creative Europe and New Narrative for Europe illustrate two aspects of cultural encounters and creative, transnational co-production in Europe: Creative Europe is about practical tools and policies that can enhance and further creative collaboration; New Narrative for Europe was a very philosophical way of trying to call upon Europe's common soul, heritage and culture (see also Battista and Setari 2014). Both sides have existed side-by-side in EU policies and thinking from the start: on the one hand, the more pragmatic, functional initiatives towards practical collaboration in a Europe of "unity in diversity"; on the other hand, more grand ideas about a unified European culture.

No doubt both positions play a role when new transnational, cultural networks are forming, but it is important to understand that creative networks are mostly formed on the ground by professionals within the institutional frameworks. The growing group of transnational European professionals that make things happen on a day-to-day basis creates transnational networks. The cultural encounters that happen here are then communicated back to audiences all over Europe as transnational cultural meetings that may challenge and test the unity in diversity of national

cultures around Europe. This is also very clearly documented both in this book and in Kuipers' (2011) excellent four-country study of how transnational professional networks form and work, as a dynamic between national and transnational: "National institutions do not disappear. Rather, national and transnational fields increasingly intersect. National fields maintain their own dynamics and relative autonomy even when incorporated into a transnational arena" (Kuipers 2011, 555).

These ideas are clearly underlined by this very timely volume from the Co-production Research Network (CoRN) where one of the strong qualities is the focus on the realities and challenges of European co-production, more than on the grand visions. It is important that researchers, policy-makers and practitioners enter into a constructive dialogue: researchers can learn from the experience of policy-makers and creative practitioners, and academic analysis can strengthen and influence practice and policy-making. It is—as the volume shows—not always easy to get access to the important data, so also in this sense a joint pressure from practitioners and academics could change things and thus make it easier to analyse the realities and challenges of European co-production.

Co-production and Creative European Networks

Co-production involves a number of dimensions and purposes. In a Europe of many countries, some of them rather small nations, co-production can be a way of enhancing film—and television budgets to compete on a global market. As this volume clearly demonstrates, there are very few pan-European big production and distribution companies in Europe, so working together and co-financing is one way of creating better productions with bigger production value and distribution potential. But besides the financial collaboration and the increased co-distribution often following co-production, there may be other more creative and cultural benefits. Co-productions that travel increase the outreach of national narratives to people around Europe and other parts of the world thus creating cultural screen encounters between people in different nations.

However, in many cases financial co-production also involves a wider creative co-production, a dialogue between financial partners or even the creating of stories based on two or more national cultures. One of the very successful stories in this regard—a part of the Nordic Noir wave—was *The Bridge* (1–4), where the storyline crossed the borders between Denmark and Sweden, and where characters and the creative team were from both

countries. The Danish main-writer of the series, Nikolaj Scherfig, has said about this particular form of co-production:

> For me […] co-productions are interesting, if they can help develop authentic stories. It is very important to create co-productions that make stories possible that build on and use cultural and national differences. The fantastic thing about *The Bridge* was that we did exactly that (..) it was a real, authentic, transnational story and reality we dealt with […] There are cultural borders everywhere, and the way we relate to people at the other side of a border is based on some specific local/national differences, but the way we relate is pretty universal, and people everywhere can read their own situation into it (Sherfig interviewed in Bondebjerg 2018, 88).

This view on creative co-production in a transnational context is certainly not just voiced by Sherfig. His idea about authentic stories building on and using national and cultural differences echoes in the words of a number of industry professionals interviewed in this volume. The idea of trying to create one homogenous European culture in film and television narratives does not have strong support in the creative film and television networks in Europe. In addition to the cases documented in this volume, the reality of the creative diversity in a co-producing Europe has also been documented in a number of studies of how co-production and creative collaboration actually works, and how buyers and distributors see Europe (see, for instance, Steemers 2004; Havens 2006; Bielby and Harrington 2008).

Inside the Complex World of European Co-production

European Film and Television Co-production: Policy and Practice gives the reader deep insight into the politics, the financial and the creative sides of European co-production. There are voices from those running the institutions and funds and driving the European policies and there are historical studies and case studies of different kinds of film and television co-productions. We also clearly enter a very diverse European landscape of small and big countries, a fragmented area indeed, where co-productions and the following networks seem to be a crucial way forward. The idea of a unified, cinematic Europe—a digital single market—may be a vision for some, but hardly a realistic possibility for any foreseeable future.

In his interesting study of ARTE—one of the few transnational television stations in Europe—*Europe Un-Imagined* (2017), the American anthropologist Damien Stankiewicz, clearly dismantles abstract grand ideas of an imagined, unified Europe. He quotes the first president of ARTE, Jérome Clément, for such a vision:

> To change mentalities, frame of mind, and to create the conditions of a veritable united Europe, it isn't enough to have a currency, an army corps, and legal directives (…) What is necessary is a *common imagination*. To think Europe together. So that Germans, French, Italians, Spanish, and all others, even the English, learn to look at the world and to think the world together. (Stankiewicz 2017, 3)

But his deep ethnological study of what goes on inside the creative and journalistic decision rooms of this channel clearly shows that the programmes they produce together come from a creative pool of ideas and norms that have roots in national cultures. Any concept of a common European culture must take into consideration that creative collaboration often thrives on difference. Also national cultures are often multi-dimensional and of course a European culture must be thought of in the plural.

This doesn't mean that transnational, mediated European encounters, co-productions and networks are not important—on the contrary (Bondebjerg et al. 2017). They are in our increasingly globalised world even more important. The diversity of European cultures is not a problem in itself. It is only a problem if we do not overcome the fragmentation of production and distribution and bring the diversity of films and television out to a European audience through cinemas, television and on digital platforms. Just as we learn from the studies in this book, reality and experience should tell us that meeting others in real life and on the screen contribute to a greater understanding.

The more producers, creative film and television people and distributors work together across borders creating European networks, the more audiences are confronted with not just national and American film and television but also a broad variety of European film and television, the bigger the chance that European diversity becomes a part of our everyday life. To work inside European screen culture is not so much about grand visions of European culture as it is about creating professional networks and bringing film and television out where the audience live their lives. This is certainly not an easy task given the still very fragmented European

film and television culture. The editors and authors of this book have made it much easier for us to understand how European co-production functions in practice: the political visions, the realities and the challenges.

Professor Emeritus Ib Bondebjerg
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: European Film and Television Co-production

Julia Hammett-Jamart, Petar Mitric, and Eva Novrup Redvall

When the Co-production Research Network (CoRN) organised the European Co-production Symposium in Copenhagen in 2016, we were thrilled to discover that it coincided with the 25th anniversary of Lars von Trier's film *Europa* (1991), and accordingly decided to use an image from the film on the conference poster. That image is now also the cover of this book.

There are several reasons why this image resonates so well with studying the policies and practices behind European film and television co-production. First and foremost, *Europa* symbolically opened a new chapter in the history of European co-production. The film was produced as a multilateral co-production with financing from Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain. It was directed by a Dane, but shot in Poland with an international cast speaking in German as well as English. Financially, it was supported by the European co-production fund, Eurimages, during the fund's first calls and went on to premiere at the 1991 Cannes International Film Festival.

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J. Hammett-Jamart et al. (eds.), *European Film and Television Co-production*, Palgrave European Film and Media Studies,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97157-5_1

At the time, *Europa* was a textbook example of the ideal European co-production and marked a new faith in fostering more transnational collaboration in European filmmaking. The film's subject matter was a shared aspect of European history—a topic that film policy makers of the 1980s and early 1990s believed would appeal to transnational European audiences—and it managed to mix countries, nationalities and languages in a way that felt organic and appropriate as opposed to a contrived 'Euro-pudding'.

Europa won three awards in Cannes and was a source of inspiration to many European filmmakers in terms of thinking about production as a transnational, rather than a solely national endeavour. A lot has happened since that time. This book examines these developments, focusing on the current state of European co-production policy and practice, while drawing on numerous examples and pivotal moments in recent film and television co-production history. Much can be learned from studying examples that are considered as best practice at a certain point in time by the industry as well as scholars—such as *Europa*—and by giving industry practitioners a voice in the academic research on co-production from a policy as well as a production perspective.

The Significance of European Co-production

International collaboration is intrinsic to filmmaking. Filmmakers hungry for exotic locations and new stories have always travelled the world to make their films and often in the process, almost by default, have entered into 'co-productions'. Shooting far from home requires the establishment of local partnerships (to identify crew, cast and locations, etc.) and, more often than not, also entails some sharing of risk. Thus, as early as the 1920s, financial co-ventures occurred between countries in Europe and also between European and non-European nations,[1] creating a circulation of talent, crew and cast across borders.[2]

Notwithstanding, it wasn't until mid-last century that these arrangements began to be formalised by governments, and this first occurred in Europe. Motivated by a desire to see European films compete with the high-budget Hollywood imports that were dominating global screens, European governments sought to increase the amounts of money available for their producers. The most obvious strategy was to facilitate the pooling of public finances between European nations, but this posed a number of challenges. National funds had been established, with binding legal instruments, strictly to benefit national films and national industries. As such, foreign films were not eligible to access such funds. Official

co-production was a way around this. In a nifty sleight of hand, intergovernmental co-production treaties were signed, providing for certified official co-productions to receive 'national treatment', thereby enabling European filmmakers to accrue public resources from several nations, to penetrate foreign markets through being assimilated as local content for the purposes of content quotas, and at the same time encouraging producers to act as ambassadors for each other's films, securing sales and distribution guarantees on behalf of their European partners in their territory.

Europe thus pioneered official co-production, with the first bilateral co-production treaty signed between Italy and France in 1949. Film scholar Anne Jäckel has described this as the beginning of the history of policy-driven co-production in Europe. She points out, however, that the official co-production mechanism was initially exploited by just a handful of high-profile producers who already had a significant track-record of international collaboration (Jäckel 2003a).

Since that time, treaties have proliferated. France currently has 57 intergovernmental agreements in place, Italy 39, and many non-European countries have also followed suit, establishing active official co-production programmes (Canada has over 50 and Australia 12, with several more in the pipeline). Co-production has accordingly become accessible to a much wider range of producers—from first-time independents to mid-size production companies, as well as large companies and studios. In the European context, two major policy triggers have further stimulated an increase and diversification in co-production.

The first is the unparalleled amount of public money being distributed through specific schemes to a wide range of productions. The European Audiovisual Observatory has identified more than 270 public film funds across Europe (Talavera et al. 2016, 27–31), comprised of supranational funds (8%), which are either pan-European or aimed at non-European countries, national/federal funds (25%), which are founded by the national governments, and subnational funds (67%), which operate at the regional or local level. On average, these funds administer €2.53 billion annually and, because access to these funds is often tied to the participation of a local producer, they create a significant incentive to co-produce.

The second policy trigger has been a number of pro-active initiatives of the Council of Europe, specifically the establishment of the dedicated co-production fund, Eurimages, in 1988,[3] and the introduction of the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production in 1994. Eurimages was the first pan-European public fund for European co-productions. It created

an immediate incentive for European producers to work together because, in order to secure financial support, a project needed to be packaged as an official co-production between European countries and also to pass a point-based test assessing its European value (Eurimages 2016).

When it became apparent that producers from some of Europe's smaller filmmaking countries were missing out on funding, because the bilateral treaties between their government and other European nations imposed requirements that could not realistically be met, the Council of Europe launched the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production (the Convention). This democratised access to official co-production, providing for all signatories to the Convention to co-produce with each other under more favourable conditions than those stipulated in some of the aforementioned bilateral co-production treaties. This then stimulated co-productions between large and small filmmaking countries, an objective that was also actively encouraged by Eurimages. These policy initiatives happened to coincide with historic shifts in Europe's geo-political landscape, associated with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the EU integration of post-Socialist countries from Eastern and Central Europe. The emergence of 'new countries' further increased and diversified co-production between Eastern and Western Europe. Film scholar Luisa Rivi has gone so far as to label co-productions made during this period 'post-Cold War co-productions' (Rivi 2007, 53).

Over and above these policy triggers for official co-production, and as part of a broader push to attract investment to Europe, there has been a proliferation of tax incentives for location shooting, post-production and digital effects (VFX). The number of tax incentive schemes in Europe jumped from 12 to 26 between 2008 and 2014 (Talavera et al. 2016, 70–71). A frequent pre-requisite for accessing such incentives is the participation of a local production company, which means that hitherto 'off-shore productions' have become de-facto co-productions, albeit non-official co-productions/private joint ventures.

Co-production has thus become inscribed in the European cinematographic landscape—both in policy instruments and production practices—to an unprecedented degree and, as a result, Europe has become a global hub for international co-production. Data provided by the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) in Chap. 2 of this volume, confirms the increasing significance of co-production in Europe. Over the past several decades, the proportion of films being made as co-productions has steadily increased, stabilising at record high levels in recent years. In

spite of the numerous complex production challenges and considerable financial and administrative burdens, European producers evidently believe that the advantages of co-producing outweigh the disadvantages, and more and more producers are choosing to co-produce. This is no doubt a reflection of increasing financial need. As Anders Kjærhauge from the Danish production company Zentropa points out in this volume, production budgets are continuing to rise while revenue streams are decreasing, so there is a growing need for producers to find financing outside of their national territory.[4] It may also have something to do with the fact that, as indicated by the EAO data, European co-productions are commercially out-performing comparative "national" films, an unequivocal incentive for filmmakers to engage in this practice.

The EAO figures capture both official and non-official co-productions and underline the significance of both types of co-production in the European film and television production landscape. We are currently seeing a multitude of different kinds of co-production set-ups, both between partners that have long histories of working together, as well as between countries with little tradition of transnational collaboration, as exemplified in the case studies within this volume of the Oscar-winning Polish-Danish feature film *Ida* (2013) and the Danish-French television drama series *Herrens veje/Ride Upon the Storm* (2017–). In this context, European co-production constitutes a particularly fertile object of study. It is somewhat surprising then, that the most recent scholarly publication dedicated specifically to European film and television co-production dates back to 1996 (Blind and Hallenberger 1996). A lot has happened since then and one of the primary aims of this book is to address this gap in the existing literature by examining the contemporary state of play.

Existing Co-production Literature

Discussion of co-production certainly permeates cinema scholarship, as the practice has been widespread in some production cultures for many years.[5] Aside from textual analyses, which focus on the aesthetics of completed films, analytical approaches to co-production can broadly be divided into three main types: conceptual; evaluative; and industry studies.

Conceptual approaches contend with co-production as an idea. They focus on how the very concept of co-production unsettles the category of national cinema or alternatively confirms the notion of transnational cinema. Studies on national cinemas, for instance, may treat co-production

as a branch of national cinema, an example of the way in which the discourse of the national encompasses a wide variety of forms and modes of production, always anchored in a particular national production and policy context (e.g. Hayward 1993; O'Regan 1996). Texts on transnational cinemas, on the other hand, tend to point to co-production as an illustration of the argument that films can never be ascribed to a particular national context (e.g. Bergfelder 2000). Typologies of transnational production, such as those proposed by Morawetz and Hjort (Morawetz 2007; Hjort 2010), may thus subordinate considerations about the structural mode of production—the fact that a project is packaged as a co-production—to other considerations, such as whether a particular project is driven by financial or cultural imperatives. Emphasis is placed on the factors motivating collaboration in a global media ecology that already inherently entails transnational collaboration. In this context co-production is not seen as belonging to a single category. There are indeed many different reasons for initiating co-productions, ranging from political and economic imperatives, to creative or artistic motivations, and certain scholars have studied the way in which these differing rationales then inform producers' approaches to the production process—from mutual decision-making about all creative aspects of the project to more pragmatic co-financing arrangements (see e.g. Brandstrup and Redvall 2005; Selznick 2008; or Jensen et al. 2016 on models in television drama co-production).

Evaluative approaches tend to consider co-productions as cultural artefacts, an expression of national cultural policies, and accordingly analyse and assess co-production in these terms, with particular scrutiny reserved for the regulated practice of official co-production. As early as the 60s, it was suggested that the dominant forms of partnerships propelled by European co-production policies were simply a gateway for US film corporations to access European public film financing (Guback 1969). More recently, Mike Wayne has written about co-production as a practice designed predominantly for rich European countries, and to the detriment of true cultural diversity (Wayne 2002); and Doris Baltruschat has suggested that co-productions are part of a neoliberal agenda to foster European identity, and subject to 'an international climate of trade liberalisation that stands in sharp contrast to cultural policies' (Baltruschat 2010, 24). Others have picked up on this, examining the role of co-production in constructing a European identity and a contemporary European cinema (e.g. Rivi 2007; Liz 2016). This has naturally led to critical evalu-

ations of the institutions that are mandated to uphold the notion of European culture. It has been suggested for instance that Eurimages may inadvertently incite producers to establish 'fake three party co-productions' and to disregard market considerations in order to satisfy the fund's political and cultural funding criteria (Kallas 1996, 61). In her evaluation of the performance of Eurimages over the first 20 years of its operation, Sophie De Vinck surmised that the fund had struggled to satisfy its cultural and economic goals (De Vinck 2009).[6]

Close analysis of the regulatory technology of European co-production tends to be less common, due in part to lack of access to industry data that would inform such analysis (Liz 2016). Accordingly, much of the detailed grounded analysis of the mechanics of co-production has come from within the industry itself (e.g. Neumann and Appelgren 2007). Angus Finney, a former film financing executive, has written about the financing mechanisms of European co-productions (Finney 1996, 2010) and Julia Hammett-Jamart, a former policy executive, has analysed policy implementation on European co-productions (Hammett-Jamart 2014). The emergence of media industry studies as a distinct discipline over the past two decades has also increased scholarly attention to this area. Several scholars have documented the costly and time-consuming challenges related to logistics, communication and translation on co-productions (e.g. Hoskins et al. 1995). Others have underlined the conflicting workplace norms and differing notions of quality that often beleaguer co-productions (e.g. Jäckel 2003a; Morawetz et al. 2007; Bondebjerg et al. 2017; Sundet 2017).

There is much to be learned from the existing scholarly research, but an aspect that remains under-examined is the concrete industrial and policy mechanisms that underpin the practice of co-production. The reason we insist on the importance of this is that it is precisely these strategies and negotiations that determine the content that is generated through this mechanism. As a scholar, it is all too easy to stand outside the production and policy apparatus and critique the outcomes of processes we don't fully understand. We may analyse on-screen factors like casting, locations and story-lines, and consider them in the light of policy reports, critical reviews and box office performance and then draw conclusions. Such analyses are valid but somewhat incomplete, because it is only when we move closer, when we seek to understand how these 'texts' were generated by the practitioners and by the policy instruments, that we are really in a position to understand whether what is seen on screen is a creative choice, the natural