



# Voices from the Peripheries: A Study of the Regional Film and Television Business in Norway

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Doctoral dissertation  
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Voices from the Peripheries:  
A Study of the Regional Film and Television  
Business in Norway

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of how regional film and television companies in Norway manage to survive and achieve their goals in the context of a larger film and television business that is centralised, economically fragile, and subsidy dependent. Interest in production studies has boomed in recent years, but little of this research addresses regional film and television companies. This thesis employs a production studies approach and incorporates theory on place and work on the creative industries. It contributes to the limited amount of research that accounts for both structural framework—in particular, the impact of film policy and dependence on public funding on these companies—and agency in terms of the intrinsic value of regional film and television production in a local, national and global context. Using multiple perspectives, this thesis presents an in-depth exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of being a regional film and television company.

The case study is its principal methodological approach, including interviews with film workers at four companies and employees at six regional film agencies, as well as policy documents, websites, newspapers and productions. The thesis focuses on four well-established regional film and television companies that have produced critically acclaimed films. All are located outside Oslo, the hub of film production in Norway. The four companies are Original Film in Tromsø, Northern Norway, Flimmer Film in Bergen, Western Norway, Mer Film in Tromsø/Bergen, Northern/Western Norway, and Filmbin in Lillehammer, central Eastern Norway.

This thesis argues that one of the greatest challenges to these regional companies (and the government that supports them) is how to develop strong, sustainable regional film milieus among a scattered populace like Norway's. The regions suffer from low production volume and brain drain and the research shows that these companies rely on human resources to deal with this challenge. Policy development indicates that the public funding of regional film is mostly based on regional and economic, but also cultural, arguments—regional film, that is, should contribute to regional development, economic growth and diversity. I argue that the economic and rural political rationale for support of this business tends to undermine the cultivation of the cultural value of regional film, as well as its quality and professionalism. However, the companies have managed to produce critically acclaimed films and the thesis reveals how the peripheral location can be a creative and economic advantage.

## Sammendrag

Denne avhandlingen er en studie av hvordan regionale film og tv-selskaper i Norge klarer å overleve og nå sine mål i en kontekst der den nasjonale film og tv-bransjen er sentralisert, har lav lønnsomhet og er avhengig av offentlig støtte. Interessen for produksjonsstudier har økt de siste årene, men lite av denne forskningen handler om regionale film og tv-selskaper. Denne avhandlingen bruker produksjonsstudier som tilnærming, inkludert teori om sted og kreative næringer. Den er et bidrag til den begrensede mengden av forskning som både ser på strukturelle rammer, særlig hvordan filmpolitikken og avhengighet av offentlig støtte påvirker selskapene, i tillegg til autonomi og egenverdien av regional film og tv-produksjon i en lokal, nasjonal og global kontekst. Studien representerer en grundig utforskning av fordeler og ulemper ved å være et regionalt film og tv-selskap.

Case studier utgjør den viktigste metodiske tilnærmingen, inkludert intervjuer med ansatte i fire regionale selskaper og ansatte ved seks regionale film sentre og fond, samt politiske dokumenter, nettstedet, aviser og produksjoner. Avhandlingen fokuserer på fire veletablerte regionale film og tv-selskaper som har produsert kritikerroste filmer. Alle er lokalisert utenfor Oslo, knutepunktet for film- og tv-produksjon i Norge. De fire selskapene er Original Film i Tromsø, Nord-Norge, Flimmer Film i Bergen, Vestlandet, Mer Film i Tromsø/Bergen, Nord-Norge/Vestlandet, og Filmbin i Lillehammer, på Østlandet.

Avhandlingen viser at en av de største utfordringene for både de regionale selskapene og myndighetene er hvordan man skal utvikle sterke, bærekraftige regionale filmmiljøer i et land med spredt bosetting og liten filmbransje. Regionene sliter med lavt produksjonsvolum og hjerneflukt og studien viser at disse selskapene utnytter menneskelige, kunnskapsbaserte ressurser for å håndtere denne utfordringen. Den filmpolitiske utviklingen indikerer at offentlig finansiering av regional film for det meste er basert på regionale og økonomiske argumenter, men også kulturelle - regional film skal bidra til regional utvikling, økonomisk vekst og mangfold. I avhandlingen argumenteres det for at den økonomiske og distriktpolitiske begrunnelsen for støtte bidrar til å undergrave den kulturelle verdien av regional film, inkludert dens bidrag til kvalitet og profesjonalitet. Imidlertid har selskapene klart å produsere kritikerroste filmer og avhandlingen viser hvordan perifer beliggenhet kan være en kreativ og økonomisk fordel for film og tv-produksjon.

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In many ways, this has practically been a regional project in itself, since I have had to travel between the office at the University of Tromsø and the office in Lillehammer. I want to thank the University of Tromsø for letting me use an office on campus Alta, and to thank the many people at UiT for their support. In particular, I am grateful to Kjell Olsen for commenting on the thesis, to Stefan Holander for proofreading the first article, and to Thomas Vordal for all support, counsel, and help with the maps. I also benefitted from presenting some of my work to the research group 'Narrating the post-colonial North', of which I am a member.

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## Preface

This thesis is the result of a three-year research project, stretching from 2014 to 2017. The related PhD position was part of the international research project *Success in the Film and Television Industries* (SiFTI), which engaged researchers from Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Great Britain. The project website states, ‘The goal is to produce new knowledge about how actors in the film and television industries operate in order to survive in the market place and to improve their competitiveness. The project is based on case studies of companies that have been active for at least five years and have produced popular and/or critically acclaimed films or television programs. SiFTI has also a historical dimension that studies the growth and fall of influential film companies in Norway on the basis of archival material’.<sup>1</sup> The leader of the project, Professor Eva Bakøy at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, was also my supervisor for the PhD position, which had the title *The Regional Film and Television Business in Norway*. I was required to write about regional film and television companies, and one of the companies had to be located in the Inland region. Other than that, I was free to develop my own approach to the subject of study.

This thesis is article based and consists of two parts. The first part, called *kappe* in Norwegian, is the final contribution and was written after the articles. The purpose of the final contribution is to pull the articles together by introducing the topic and research areas, and to integrate the contents of the whole thesis. It should consist of a coherent account of the whole study, in order to provide the necessary context and background for the articles and to offer broader discussions on topics that the articles do not permit, due to their format. Part 2 consists of the three articles, presented in the order in which they were written.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://sifti.no/index.php/en/> [accessed 16.01.17].



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## **PART 1. THE FINAL CONTRIBUTION**



## CHAPTER 1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the implications of being a Norwegian film and television company in the regions outside of the capital, Oslo, the hub of film and television production in Norway. While researchers have long analysed content, form and style in films, I believe it is important to be aware of who tells the stories, who produces them and where they take place as well. These broad questions engage with local versus national aspects of film and television, as well as the importance of place in a globalised world in which North American films continue to dominate. Norwegian politicians have stated that film is important because it represents the nation's society and culture. What this culture is made of, and who decides what should be produced in it, are engaging political issues, and they have fuelled my own interest in regional film and television.

In addition, regional film and television companies have received little academic attention, despite being worthy of research for several reasons:

(1) Politically, regional film is attractive to policymakers both in Norway and elsewhere in Europe because of its supposedly positive impact on economic growth and regional development. Article 1 examines these expectations, the consequent development of film policy and the ways in which regional film and television companies perceive that policy.

(2) Economically, the topic of the thesis may offer perspective upon the Norwegian film business's financial struggles. By studying four companies which have survived against the odds, this thesis theorises what it takes to survive over time. This is the topic of article 2.

(3) Culturally and regionally, the thesis sheds light on contemporary debates about regional film as a contributor to diversity, and on the importance of place and regional filmmaking in an increasingly globalised world. Article 3 addresses these issues.

Case studies represent my research strategy for exploring four Norwegian regional film and television companies, situated in three different cities and regions, within a historical and political context.<sup>1</sup> I interviewed fourteen film workers as my primary empirical sources, and they were employed at Original Film in Tromsø, Northern Norway; Flimmer Film in Bergen, Western Norway; Mer Film in Tromsø/Bergen, Northern and

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 for a map of the companies and chapter 5 for a presentation of the companies.

Western Norway; and Filmbin, in central Eastern Norway (the Inland region). I use production studies as my overall theoretical approach, with a special emphasis on the geographical dimension of the business and further engagement with creative industries, knowledge-based resources and the importance of place as an inspiration and a contributor to diversity. This thesis therefore contributes to production studies as a field by addressing the implications of geographical location for regional film and television companies. It focuses on the relationship between structures, such as policy and historical context, and agency: including autonomy and the meaning of regional film and television production seen from the companies' perspectives.

I will next elaborate further upon the importance of this study and the discussions that surround regional film, then present the aims and research questions. I will conclude with an overview of the articles and thesis structure.

### **Why study regional film?**

Production studies as a field is growing, but regional film production companies have received little academic attention. In addition to an article on film policy written by Bjerkeland (2015) and my own published articles (Eira, 2015; Sand, 2016a, 2016b), few existing studies on film production have touched upon the regional film and television production business in Norway. Enerhaug and Larsen (2013) and Iversen (2013) briefly describe the development of regional film policy in their overview of the Norwegian film and television business, and a few master's theses discuss how film and television production in the regions might increase tourism and place branding, and why private investors might want to invest in film productions (Berg, 2010; Kongsrud, 2013). The so-called creative industries, which include film and television, are high on the political agenda of many European countries, including Norway, thanks to their supposedly positive impact on regional development (Newsinger, 2009, 2012; K. Oakley, 2004; Pinheiro & Hauge, 2014; Turok, 2004). The number of regional film funds in Europe has never been higher (Newman-Baudais, 2011). In Norway, which has relied economically on oil production since the 1970s, culture has been called 'the new oil', and in 2015, a national knowledge centre for cultural businesses, the *Kunnskapsverket*, was established as well.

Existing research typically concentrates on the creative industries as a tool for achieving something else—often economic growth (Gray, 2007). In addition, many of these studies are broad and devoted to quantitative approaches and statistics (Power, 2003; Skoglund & Jonsson, 2012). As Bilton (2007, p. 61) notes, cultural policy should try to understand the activities themselves, not simply map the creative industries through surveys. This thesis addresses this gap by looking at how the people who work in small, regional companies perceive their work, and it contributes with insight that can inform researchers, people in the film and television business, and those bureaucrats and politi-



cians who determine film and other cultural policy. In a report, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture proposed that cultural policy should be based on research to a greater extent (NOU 2013:4).

Regional development is important in Norway, because state policy asserts that people should be able to live and thrive anywhere in the country. Norway also features a relatively scattered population anyway. Among other things, the government wants film and television production to take place in the regions, not only in Oslo, the capital, where approximately 50 per cent of private film and television companies and 80 per cent of that business's employees are located (Ryssevik, Dahle, Høgestøl, & Myhrvold-Hanssen, 2014, p. 43). Regional film policy, that is, furthers an overarching policy that emphasises regional and rural development, and it is a policy goal to strengthen regional film as a counterweight to the dominance of the capital (Ministry of Culture, 2015a). Thanks to its commitment to the regions, Norway represents a good place to study regional film and television in particular.

Because many Norwegian companies in the film and television business rely heavily on subsidies and the competition is fierce, film policy and the allocation of funding are significant concerns. In 2015, 80 per cent of the funding from the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI) went to companies in the Oslo area and over the past five years, Oslo has received between 73 and 85 per cent of the funding (NFI, 2015a, p. 25). In addition, NFI received 87 per cent of the funding from the government in 2016, whereas regional film agencies received 13 per cent (Prop. 1 S (2015-2016), p. 133). In other words, public funding is still centralised. However, this allocation praxis is debated within the Norwegian film business.

After the introduction of the new national film policy in 2015, an interesting debate appeared in the Norwegian film and television magazine *Rushprint*. The Oslo-based cinematographer John Christian Rosenlund wrote: 'Imagine that we were about to establish one of the best football teams in Europe. And then, the day we realize that this is happening—we are making a super team—then we split up the team and let the players, one by one, move out to the regions to establish new teams. (...) This is a nice rural and regional political thought. But it is not how you create a super team' (Rosenlund, 2015).<sup>2</sup> He then went on to argue that Norwegian film policy should promote a centralised elite milieu in Oslo. Producer Lars Løge of Flimmer Film in Bergen, Western Norway, the second largest city in Norway, countered: 'Easy now, Zlatan. Many people also think that internal, nice competition creates quality. Internal in terms of Norway, not Oslo. (...) Look beyond the film milieu in Oslo, and you will discover a Messi in

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<sup>2</sup> All translations from Norwegian to English in this thesis are mine.

Stavanger and a Ronaldo in Bergen' (Løge, 2015).<sup>3</sup> To invest all the money in a small elite milieu in Oslo, he argued, is not how to achieve international success. The leader of the regional film centre Vestnorsk filmsenter [Western Norway Film Centre], Stine Tveten, also argued against Rosenlund and said that film activity all over the country promotes diversity and quality: 'The regions are not the enemy—the regions want to take part in lifting the film business to new heights. If we work together Norway can be a film nation!' (Tveten, 2015).

Even though Norwegian film policy applauds regional film, a debate remains within this small and fragile business. One side emphasises centralisation as a prerequisite for achieving professionalism, while the other side promotes regional variation as crucial to quality. Regional film and television production thus activates the tension between centre and periphery which also touches upon arguments within the field over professionalism versus amateurism and the virtues and vices of breadth as opposed to depth of the talent pool. Some still feel that film and television production in the regions is less professional than it is in Oslo, and that the government's support of regional film is simply an effort to promote regional development more generally, whatever the cost in quality to the business as a whole. Critical voices have even questioned why the Norwegian Film School is not in Oslo. It was established in Lillehammer in 1997, in the facilities that hosted the media centre during the 1994 Winter Olympics. This decision was part of a government policy requiring cultural institutions to be spread all over the country as well, and the city of Lillehammer has approximately 27 000 inhabitants and is located 190 kilometres north of Oslo.

When writing about regional film companies in a small European country such as Norway, one must acknowledge the issue of size as well. Much earlier research on film and television production companies focuses on larger companies based in big cities. Many of them are conglomerates with multiple employees and a hierarchical structure which is very different from the typical regional film and television company in Norway. Regional film companies generally have few employees and little money, and many of their owners must become mediators among the occasionally contentious interests of management, money making and creative autonomy (Hesmondhalgh, 2010). Research that addresses creative industries in larger cities and commercial film productions is therefore not necessarily transferable to a regional and Norwegian context.

It is true, as well, that the government's support of regional film and television is partly based on rural and regional political arguments for more job opportunities, place promotion and branding, tourism, and regional development in general. Yet this support is also based on cultural arguments and ideals connected to diversity and variability in

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<sup>3</sup> Lars Løge is one of the interviewees in this thesis.

both stories and settings. But how can regional film and television supply diversity in the context of a globalised world where everybody talks about the Americanisation of the film and television industries (Crane, 2014; Feigenbaum, 2007; Lorenzen, 2007)? In short, regional film confronts and foregrounds questions about who speaks and, further, who is allowed a voice which activate local, national and global perspectives (Sklan, 1996) and raise larger issues concerning democracy and representation. Media production in different places can ‘open up shared spaces for discussion and debate on matters of public interest’ (McGonagle & Eijk, 2016, p. 11). Regional film and television also touches upon nation building, which is an important aspect of film and culture policy in Norway. One of the arguments behind Norwegian (and European) film policy is that film represents and visualises a country’s common heritage (Jäckel, 1996).

### **Aims and research questions**

This thesis explores four regional film and television companies located in three different regions outside of the capital, Oslo, in a historical and political context. It contributes to a number of complex debates concerning business and culture, including regional film production as a promoter of economic growth and regional development versus the artistic virtues of regional film production; the best strategies for surviving and succeeding in a difficult business; and the meaning of place and diversity, including hegemonic discourses of centre and periphery. Production studies and case studies are its theoretical and methodological starting points, which I outline in chapters 4 and 5.

The overall research question is:

*What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a regional film and television production company in Norway?*

The companies themselves represent my starting point, which means that I begin by exploring what the interviewees view as benefits and drawbacks of being located in the region. I look at how they experience their work and how they achieve their goals, given the circumstances. My main research question also accounts for the fact that regional film and television production is important to the Norwegian government because of its presumed economic and regional impact, but also creative impact.

It is important to clarify two things here. First, it is difficult to maintain a distinction between film and television, because people who produce both film and television often refer to themselves simply as filmmakers and to their businesses as film companies. Some produce short films and documentaries for television, and many produce both television documentaries and documentaries for cinema. In the regions, in short, very few companies produce only feature-length films. I therefore use the terms ‘regional film and television’ and simply ‘regional film’ synonymously in this thesis, unless I specify otherwise.

Second, I write both ‘*regional* film and television’ and ‘film and television production *in the regions*’. As I discuss in my third article, not all regional companies perceive themselves as regional but instead as international. For my purposes here, both phrases simply refer to where the companies are located. I elaborate further on the concept of ‘region’ in chapter 2.

To begin to unpack my overall research question, I developed three sub-questions, each of which is a starting point for an article.

*RQ1: How do the regional companies relate to the political and economic framework?*

The first research question (RQ1) addresses the ways in which political and economic frameworks impact regional companies, and the ways in which they respond. What characterises regional film policy today, and what are the arguments supporting that policy? How do these companies in turn experience that policy? The implementation of regional film policy in Norway also reflects developments in Europe. Policy development is important to address when discussing regional film in Norway because of the companies’ dependence on public funding, which has its advantages and disadvantages.

*RQ2: How do the regional companies manage to survive and pursue their goals?*

The Norwegian film business is not characterised by great economic success, and survival itself is a challenge for production companies. The second research question (RQ2) prompts a discussion of what it means to succeed, and what factors have been crucial to companies’ success in relation to their definitions of it. RQ2 relates to the main research question by specifically addressing how regional affiliation impacts a company’s ability to achieve its goals. To address this research question, I chose to concentrate on feature film, a prioritised area within Norwegian film policy that very few regional companies specialise in. Two of the companies that constitute the cases for this thesis have managed to succeed in feature film. Under this question’s rubric, I also look at companies that are committed to artistic films, which are economically challenging because they do not necessarily address a broad audience. In all, RQ2 enables the exploration of what is necessary to succeed as a small regional company.

*RQ3: In what ways is geographical location important to the regional companies?*

The third research question (RQ3) takes as its starting point the fact that both film workers in the regions and film policy itself argue that regional film production gives rise to more varied films. RQ3 thus explicitly addresses the meaning of place. Does the geographical location matter to their work? If so, how? RQ3 focuses on whether companies benefit from being located in a region and whether this affects their choices of projects.

## Overview of the articles

I will now present a brief summary of the articles, in the order in which they were written. The regional companies in question are part of the Norwegian film and television business and experience the same challenges as other companies, plus those related to their geographical location. How the companies relate to film policy (RQ1), what they do to survive and pursue their goals (RQ2), and how geographical location affects their work (RQ3) all take regional affiliation as a starting point.

### Article 1: Supporting ‘Film Cultural Peripheries’? The dilemmas of regional film policy in Norway

This article addresses RQ1: *How do the regional companies relate to the political and economic framework?* Few studies discuss regional film policy and the ways in which film workers respond to it, and article 1 addresses this gap by drawing on all four cases, government reports, interviews with people working in the regional film agencies, policy documents, guidelines for regional film agencies, and newspaper articles as part of its research approach. I argue that the regionalisation process in Norwegian film policy is part of a trend in which the government emphasises endogenous factors—that is, how the regions themselves can contribute to regional development. The article reveals that an important rationale behind the public funding of regional film is its economic potential and impact upon regional development, which relates to the creative industries concept. However, I argue that this regionalisation process also represents centralisation *within* the regions—a focus on clusters and a commitment to fewer regions—in contrast to the earlier commitment to *all* the regions. This regional centralisation relates to the shift from the Labour government to the Conservative Party and Progress Party government in 2013.

The article also shows that regional film should increase the quality of Norwegian film and contribute to diverse film expressions, according to the latest government policy. Due to the economic imperative accompanying regional film work, however, these companies must concentrate on the business aspects of their work in order to justify their existence. This is paradoxical, given that all four companies want to produce artistically ambitious films.

The film policy development in Norway reveals centre-periphery issues between the centralised film business in Oslo and the regional film business in the rest of the country with respect to the allocation of funding. Many have wondered: Is it possible to achieve strong, professional film milieus all over the country when the film business in Norway is small and economically fragile? This article exposes that low production volume and the fact that most of the funding from the Norwegian Film Institute goes to companies in the Oslo region, are challenging for regional film production.

Article 1 maps the Norwegian and European regional film policy context and introduces more specific discussions about how being a *regional* company affects those companies' work. It is an important 'background' article for the whole thesis. At the time that I finished the article in 2015, the government introduced its new film policy, and, as a result, the regional film institution landscape changed. I give an update on these changes in chapter 2.

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### **Article 2: How to Succeed with Film Production in the Regions? A Study of Key Success Factors in the Norwegian Regional Film Business**

The point of departure for this article is RQ2: *How do the regional companies manage to survive and achieve their goals?* Here, I use interviews with people at Mer Film and Filmbin, both of which focus on feature film production. Feature film is a relatively prestigious area within film policy in Norway, and, as I reveal in article 1, feature film production is important to the regional film business in general because it usually commands higher budgets and supplies more job opportunities than documentaries and short films. However, few *regional* film companies produce feature films, and many feature film-producing companies struggle to survive. In this article, I argue that any discussion of success in this regard must relate to context, which, in this case, encompasses dependency on public funding and economic fragility, and the companies' own goals for themselves and their work.

I apply a knowledge-based perspective to analyse the companies' success factors and argue that reputation, talent development and choice of genre, networking and social capital, risk diversification, entrepreneurship, and organisational culture and leadership are essential success factors for these companies. In addition, geographical location delivers creative advantages (branding, access to local talent, scenery and region-based stories), economic advantages (locally inclined private and public funding), and social capital (local support, reciprocity and trust within the local film milieu).

I also argue that skills and networking, in addition to a proactive strategy towards changing distribution systems and talented international and national producers and directors, allowed Mer Film to become one of Norway's most successful feature film companies. Filmbin developed different goals and strategies and met with different results—for example, Filmbin does not produce as many films as Mer Film, because they, like many other companies, generate not only feature films but also other film-related work.

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### **Article 3: Different places, different stories? The importance of place in regional film- and television production**

Article 3 relates specifically to the companies' geographical locations, and to RQ3: *In what ways is geographical location important to the regional companies?* I use interviews with people in all four companies, as well as company websites and films, to consider whether location is advantageous or disadvantageous for these companies. I draw upon three theoretical interpretations of place: sense of place, locale, and location. Research on the creative industries tends to focus on how these companies affect the places where they are located. In this article, I reverse the equation, because the Norwegian government supports regional film based on the premise that film production in different places will result in more varied work. In short, the argument is pro-diversity and based on the notion that place matters.

Although there is some international film research on place and global/local issues, few studies examine whether filmmaking in the regions does, or can, contribute to diversity in film. This article demonstrates that place matters as a source of creative inspiration—being outside the centre inspires these companies to think more freely. The companies also benefit from their active use of local competence and generate a diverse process and product through the use of the local landscape in their productions, a reliance upon local directors and film workers, and the telling of stories that actually take place in the regions. I therefore argue that these companies accept responsibility for promoting the local film business within which they thrive, and that they contest condescension within the cultural field regarding their professionalism.

This article will be published in 2017 in the book *Building Sustainable and Successful Film and Television Businesses: A Cross-National Perspective*, ed. Eva Bakøy, Roel Puijk and Andrew Spicer. Bristol: Intellect Ltd.

### **Thesis structure**

The first part of the thesis, the final contribution, consists of six chapters. The present chapter introduces the thesis, including the research questions and an article overview. Chapter 2 presents the national and historical contexts for this inquiry and includes a discussion of the region as a concept and the importance of the regions to Norway. The second chapter also presents a review of existing research on regional film and television, as well as an overview of the national and regional film and television business in Norway. In chapter 3, I examine the development of regional film policy in Norway and give an update on the newest policy. I also address the rationale behind public funding from a European perspective. Chapter 4 presents this study's overarching theoretical perspectives. Chapter 5 describes the methodological foundation of the articles and reviews discussions and challenges related to case studies, qualitative interviews and the study's

other empirical sources. In the sixth chapter, I return to the overall research question and use the findings and arguments from the final contribution and the articles to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being a regional company. The last chapter also offers a conclusion, addresses theoretical implications and presents thoughts regarding future research.

The second part of the thesis consists of the three articles.



## CHAPTER 2. Contextualising the region

To effectively discuss the cases in this study, it is necessary to first place them within a broader context. I will begin by defining the region as a concept. While Norway is the empirical context of my study, my research is situated within a broader international literature on regional film and television, which I present in this chapter as well. I then address the historical regional context, given its influence on regional film policy today (discussed in chapter 3). I conclude with a review of the Norwegian film and television business within which the regional companies do their work.

### Defining the region

The definition of ‘region’ must be clarified and specified if one is to understand the premises of this thesis. Region is a Latin word meaning to rule or govern (Lysgård, 2004). It can be related to administrative levels or units (an administrative region), to landscape and nature (a natural region) and to identity (a cultural region). For instance, Bondebjerg and Redvall (2011) activate a notion of region when they describe film and television culture in Scandinavia according to the affinities of its three neighbouring countries: Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Identity, business and political-administrative issues inform this concept in a Norwegian context (Hanssen, Klausen, & Lange-land, 2012).

For the purposes of this study, the geographic definition of ‘region’ refers to the areas outside the capital, Oslo, and its neighbour municipality Akershus, which together constitute the centre of film and television production in Norway. More than 600 000 people live in Oslo, and the population of Norway is approximately 5 million. It is scattered—the largest county, Finnmark, covers 48,6 square kilometres but has only 75 500 inhabitants.

Narrowing the understanding of ‘region’ here to the areas outside the capital is first and foremost a geographical delimitation, but it takes structural and identity forces into account as well. Frisvoll and Rye (2009) describe regions as *processes*, foregrounding, first of all, those structural driving forces that are behind the formation and reformation of regions. In terms of identity, region is also constructed through social processes and represents a concrete category in people’s minds—that of a ‘regional identity’. Paasi (2002) defines regional identity, or regional consciousness, as the inhabitants’ identification with the region. Both structure and identity aspects of region inform the work of this thesis—film and television companies in the regions are affected by structures

such as funding opportunities and guidelines, for example. But region should not be reduced to structure, because the presence (or absence) of a regional identity clearly impacts how the people who work in regional film and television companies relate to their geographical location. I elaborate upon these issues further in article 3, using place as a starting point. Article 3 demonstrates that region to these companies is a practical or administrative matter, in that they relate to the local film milieu and to regional film agencies. It also has natural implications, in that the companies actively use their natural surroundings (such as mountains and fjords) in their productions. Lastly, region has a subjective meaning, because place inspires these companies and individuals and serves as a creative starting point for the stories they want to tell.

## **Research on regional film and television production**

Research on film and television production companies in the regions can hardly be described as a field, which is both an advantage and a disadvantage for this project. This study addresses an evident gap, but it is hard to situate this work within the existing research, because the amount is limited. That said, regional film and television touches upon questions of centre and periphery, the negotiation of business and creative interests, and the relations among the global, national and local/regional. These issues have received much scholarly attention, and the following discussion will position this thesis in relation to what is out there.

### *Regional film production, flexibility and continuity*

Many regions want to attract film production, but does it necessarily benefit the local film business? In Norway, Sweden is often mentioned as an example of how to succeed with regional film production, and the results have clearly inspired local initiative-takers in Norway. Among the Nordic countries, Sweden is a special case when it comes to regional film production. Stockholm, the capital, is no longer the nation's main production site. Dahlström and Hermelin (2007), and especially Olof Hedling (2010b), write about what Hedling calls 'the regional turn' in Swedish film production. Stockholm used to be the undisputed hub, but nowadays the regional production centres Filmpool Nord in Northern Sweden, Film i Väst in Western Sweden, and Film i Skåne in Southern Sweden have taken over. The two regions around Filmpool Nord and Film i Väst even received financing from the EU's European Regional Development Fund, which was supplemented by local funds and the Swedish Film Institute. As in Norway and many other European countries, the regional production centres have 'territorialization clauses' (Dahlström & Hermelin, 2007). This usually means that production must be located in the given area, producers need to have a local office, and half of the employees should be locals. While there are some similarities between Norwegian and Swedish regional film production, the main difference is that the three Swedish centres mentioned

have a strength and size that none of the Norwegian centres have. *Film i Väst* is the most successful centre, and its work has inspired regional film production in Norway as well. However, *Film i Väst* has received a considerable amount of EU funding (Blomgren & Blomgren, 2003). Since Norway is not an EU member, the Norwegian regional film agencies are not allowed to apply for EU funding.

According to Blomgren and Blomgren (2003), the regionalisation of Swedish film production has two explanations. First, the national state has lost some of its power, and the regions have become increasingly autonomous. Second, film policy in Sweden has moved from cultural subsidy towards an emphasis on the business potential of film, which has attracted municipalities to invest money in regional film production in the interests of good returns. The decentralisation process in Sweden is policy driven at the national and regional levels and has encouraged local and regional entrepreneurship as well (Hedling, 2010b, p. 75).

According to Hedling (2010b), Swedish regional production has resulted in new talents and more films, wider availability of funding, the development of regionally based private capital, the gradual transition of power from the central Swedish Film Institute to these regional centres, and a slightly growing share of local fare at the national box office. Hedling (2010b) also finds that this regional turn has helped Swedish cinema avoid the downward spiral in European cinema markets in terms of competing against the offerings of Hollywood (Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2014; Elsaesser, 2005).

Still, Hedling notes that this boost in regional film in Sweden has some inherent structural difficulties as well. For example, though there is money available, not very many large private companies have emerged in the regions, and many film workers still prefer to live in Stockholm. Related difficulties also came to the surface via Dahlström and Hermelin's large survey on film workers in feature film production in Sweden (2007). They found that even though film production in Sweden is now decentralised, the geography of film workers diverges from that of film productions. Because this work is project based, film workers' practice is characterised by mobility and flexibility. This means that many film workers stay temporarily in the regions to work on a film project and that Stockholm retains the greatest density of film workers.

The survey also says that film workers from Stockholm dominate film production in the regions. One interesting finding is that 43 per cent of the film workers in Norrbotten, the area around *Filmpool Nord*, received unemployment benefits in 2005 (Dahlström & Hermelin, 2007). The article does not explain why this might have been so—a lack of continuity of work, for example, or lack of competence. The survey also showed that most film workers in Sweden depend on incomes from work outside of the film industry, given its uncertain nature. The article therefore underlines the importance of

developing many skills, as this can make it easier to survive outside of film work. As I show in article 2, risk diversification by not relying solely on film production is a strategy to survive as a company as well. Dahlström and Hermelin's survey also indicates that film workers in Stockholm are more specialized and in fact dominate film production in Swedish film, regardless of where the project is located. The arrival of highly skilled film workers from Stockholm in the regions can be positive, of course, because they bring competence, dynamism and the possibility of knowledge transfer.

Other researchers have looked at whether visiting film productions in a given region boost the regional film business. For example, regional film production centres serve as alternative production facilities for studios in Hollywood, but "with flexible specialization the film production industry has a minimized commitment to the local labour pool and usually does not make investments in the regional infrastructure. Because of this it is difficult for second-order centres to obtain steady, long-term production work" (Lukinbeal, 2004, p. 311). Still, some regional centres may be competitive in the long run, Lukinbeal argues, because of low-cost services and a regional sense of place and distinctive locational looks. In the United States, film and television production have moved beyond Hollywood to new locations in the United States, Canada and abroad. Film workers and film production are increasingly mobile, and some researchers argue that regional film offices are becoming more important as network intermediaries, connecting visiting creative professionals with local resources (Foster, Manning, & Terkla, 2013). The kind of governance and activity that regional film offices develop can therefore be of importance to the development of regional film milieus. However, the local film workers need to have the relevant competences, or the visiting production will have to bring film workers to the region.

According to Hedling, this is the situation in Ystad, which is the location of the popular television series and films about the fictional detective Kurt Wallander, written by Henning Mankell. Ystad is a small Swedish town in Southern Sweden. There are two obvious reasons for shooting in Ystad: the story is set there, and there is a financial incentive. The challenges include a lack of production infrastructure and skilled film workers, which means increased production costs (Hedling, 2010b, p. 75). Because Ystad as a production site is connected to the Wallander brand, it is difficult to predict the future of Ystad as a film city. In 2014, it had been twenty years since the first TV series about Wallander was produced. As Hedling suggests, it may be that film workers are reluctant to move to Ystad, because the city's dependence on the Wallander brand makes it vulnerable.

This research is relevant in a Norwegian context as well. During a successful period in 2006–2007, the city of Bergen, Western Norway served as the location for six films about the fictional private detective Varg Veum from Bergen. The films were based

on a series of crime novels written by the Norwegian author Gunnar Staalesen. After production concluded, however, Bergen as a film region suffered a down period and brain drain. Then six new Veum films were scheduled, but the first was almost entirely shot in Oslo, causing regional film fund Fuzz in Bergen to pull out of the project. The next five films were produced in Bergen, however, with many local film workers as part of the crew, and the film milieu in Bergen once again enjoyed a productive period in 2009–2010. After that, production went down again.

These examples indicate some of the unique complexities of regional film and television production. They also show how structures such as funding opportunities, production infrastructure and the flexibility of film workers impact the local film business. Film production in the regions does not necessarily develop and boosts the local film milieu if these productions depend on visiting film workers. Visiting film productions can contribute to work opportunities for the local film workers but the regions cannot rely on these productions to develop a regional, thriving business. It is equally challenging to build a viable film business *in* the regions or to depend on visiting productions to sustain a business in the regions. This thesis examines how the companies deal with these challenges.

### *Regional film funding policy and regional filmmaking*

Jack Newsinger's work on regional filmmaking, film policy and the creative industries in England is of special interest to this study, because the relevant policy development in England has its parallel in Norway, and because Newsinger also addresses regional filmmaking (Newsinger, 2009, 2010, 2012). The Norwegian film business also resembles the British film industry in size. Blair, Grey, & Randle (2001, p. 172) describe the British film industry as a cottage industry consisting of many small, independent production companies.

Newsinger describes how the British regional film industry has gone from a cultural and social to a commercial orientation, thanks to the introduction of the creative-industries policies in the English regions between 1980 and 2010 (Newsinger, 2012). From the perspective of the local authorities, the development of creative-industries policies derived from a desire to boost local economies and reduce unemployment, and there were a number of attempts to measure the economic impact of the cultural sector. The greater subsidy was followed by growth in the cultural sectors, but there were other consequences as well, including an audio-visual policy determined to a large degree by commercial interests which in turn gave rise to a regional cultural policy that has become virtually indistinguishable from economic policy (Newsinger, 2010).

Newsinger argues that this new regional-film funding policy, whereby the regional funding agencies assert strict conditions upon, for example, a film's form, content and

length, has dampened creative autonomy in regional film production sectors (2009, p. 50). He concludes: 'In a film policy discourse that views culture as a function of commercial interests, this works to restrict the space available for the production of films which do not fit into a narrowly perceived commercial formula. Ideas of cinema as a cultural practice, while still present at a rhetorical level, have been made effectively redundant in regional film production funding' (Newsinger, 2009, p. 52). This utilisation of creative policy for practical or instrumental ends (Gray, 2009) resonates with the growing importance of the economic imperative, or the dominance of market logic (Caldwell, 2013; Hjort & Petrie, 2007). As I show in this chapter and in the first article, this development has its parallel in Norway as well. A report about film and regional development in the Nordic countries, written by Nordregio, a Nordic research institute, in cooperation with the Swedish Film Institute, also confirms that on a regional level, public film funding is mostly motivated by the power of regional development to improve employment prospects (Dahlström *et al.*, 2005).

Not surprisingly, research on creative industries and economic growth points in many directions. For instance, Skoglund and Jonsson (2012) argue that the cultural and creative industries (CCI) can be a strong contributor to employment and business activity in remote regions. According to their article, in the small county of Jämtland in northern Sweden, the CCI represents more than 10 per cent of the total number of businesses and contributes over 8 per cent of the county's gross regional product. It is difficult to say how much the film business contributes on its own, as it is one of fifteen CCI sub-categories. In a study of the cultural industries' contribution to Scandinavian economies and labour markets, Dominic Power argues that the cultural industries have become an important contributor to the economy, regional development, trade and consumption activity in the Nordic countries (Power, 2003, pp. 174-175). This study also involves a wide and diverse selection of fifteen categories including film, advertising, architecture and jewellery, and it highlights general patterns rather than specific details by category. It is therefore challenging to use the results from these kinds of surveys, because they are broad and do not account for specific context-based factors.

Other researchers are sceptical about the supposedly positive impact of the creative industries on regional economies. In the Netherlands, Stam, De Jong, and Marlet (2008) argue that the creative industries only seem to propel economic growth in the metropolitan city of Amsterdam. According to Turok (2004), who has examined the film and television industries in Scotland, these sectors have a more modest economic impact than has been assumed as well.

### *Promoting 'cultural business': The creative industries in Norway*

As part of the process of regional renewal, the creative industries discourse has be-

come increasingly important in Norway. Numerous reports discuss the creative industries, including film and television, and how they contribute to economic growth and regional development (Dahlström et al., 2005; Gran, Torp, & Theie, 2015; Haraldsen, Hagen, & Alnes, 2008; Opdal, Røed, & Hoff, 2013). In 2001, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Trade and Industry released the report ‘Tango for to. Samspill mellom kulturliv og næringsliv’ [Tango for two: Interaction between culture and business] (2001). It clearly indicates a new commitment on the business aspect of culture and it discusses how culture-based businesses might contribute to regional development, including place promotion, tourism, branding, innovation, and job creation.

In Norway, the concept of *kulturnæring* [cultural business] emerged in 2004, in the first report that mapped the culture-related business in Norway (Haraldsen & Flygind, 2004). An updated report followed in 2008. Cultural businesses, according to the later report, are those ‘businesses that produce commercialized cultural expressions that communicate through aesthetic symbols, sign, images, movements, forms, sounds, and stories’ (Haraldsen et al., 2008, p. 16). This definition, which has influenced both film and cultural policy and research in Norway, is clearly inspired by the definition of the creative industries introduced by the British government in 1997. According to Pinheiro and Hauge (2014), the cultural and creative industries (CCI) have come to inform a global, hegemonic ‘myth’ that has transcended national boundaries and become party to a host of historical trajectories, local dynamics and strategic imperatives. Norwegian policy tends to follow European policymaking trends (Pinheiro & Hauge, 2014, p. 90). It is important to note, as well, that the Norwegian definition of a cultural business is very broad and encompasses architecture, cultural heritage, design, music, television and radio, artistic business, print media, market communication, and film, video, and photography (Haraldsen et al., 2008, p. 23).

In 2005, the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs announced a new policy labelled *Kultur og næring* [Culture and business] (2005). Its goal was to explore how cultural businesses could contribute to innovation and economic growth, particularly in the regions. A recent report from the consultancy Menon shows that economic growth in Norwegian cultural businesses increased with 15 per cent between 2008 and 2014 (Gran et al., 2015). Promoting the business aspect of culture is a clearly stated policy goal (Prop. 1 S (2016-2017)).

After a period of deindustrialization that included an increased focus on knowledge and innovation, the cultural businesses came to represent a new source of employment. As Pinheiro and Hauge (2014) note, ‘commercial intentions have become an accepted (legitimate) policy objective also when using the creative industry discourse to promote regional development’. This is important to bear in mind when discussing the development of regional film and television production.

### *Regional film and tourism*

One of the reasons why local and regional authorities and private investors want to support the regional film business is because of its supposedly positive effect on tourism and place branding. New Zealand is a famous example here, where the *Lord of the Rings* films (2001, 2002, 2003) have had a huge impact on film-inspired tourism. This story has inspired other countries as well (Beeton, 2005), many of which now try to encourage film production in specific geographic areas, hoping it will result in more tourists and other economic benefits (Connell, 2012, p. 2). In Norway, the City Council of Oslo supported the production of the film *Snømannen* [The snowman], which is based on the crime novel written by Jo Nesbø, hoping it will promote the city and lure more productions to Oslo in turn.

Ystad, a small town in Southern Sweden, is the location for thirty-two Wallander films (Hedling, 2010b). Wallanderland is an example of how film tourism can develop around an author like Henning Mankell and his books and films about Inspector Kurt Wallander (Sjöholm, 2013). From 2004 to 2008, the financial gains from tourism in Ystad increased 10 per cent per annum (Hedling, 2010a). The local tourist office, local authorities, and local representatives from both public and private sectors have promoted these developments. According to Hedling (2010a), the Wallander films have been important to tourism, place promotion, the rebranding of the town as 'Film-Friendly Ystad', and the town's general economic life. Nevertheless, Hedling (2010a) notes that it is difficult to say what the effects will be in the long run. What will happen to film tourism in Ystad after Wallander?

### *Regional film between aesthetic and economic needs*

According to Lev (1986), fundamental characteristics of regional cinema include the presentation of a specifically regional theme that is tied to regional identity; historical and cultural accuracy; and visual accuracy. But are regionally produced films more authentic, or different from films and television programmes produced by production companies that are more distant, both geographically and mentally, from regional aspects and concerns?

In her article about Canadian regional cinema, Jäckel (2007, p. 42) asks, 'Can one talk in any meaningful way of regional identities when cultural hybridisation is everywhere?' Serra Tinic also addresses these questions in her book *On Location: Canada's Television Industry in a Global Market* (2005). Tinic looks at the ways in which regional producers navigate between the economic and aesthetic needs of a global media industry, political and economic limitations on a local and national level, and the nationalist cultural goals of Canadian broadcasting policy. Talking to television producers in Vancouver, she found that stories that were overtly place specific were difficult to pitch to



international distributors. The larger the market, the more homogenous or universal the programme in question needed to be. Based on similar research in Latin America, Waisboard (2004, p. 370) concludes similarly: 'Content that is strongly embedded in local and national cultures has a better chance to be successful domestically, but it is less likely to find interested buyers and enthusiastic audiences abroad'.

To sum up, existing research on regional film shows a growing interest in regional film from an economic perspective among researchers, local investors and municipals, and policymakers. Regional film is seen as a contributor to regional development, tourism, branding and work opportunities. My study takes this thinking further by examining the interconnections between regional film companies and policy and geographical location by offering a bottom-up perspective that starts with the companies to ascertain the meaning of their work, including their artistic goals. I elaborate further on regional perspectives in chapter 4, where I present my use of production studies as a theoretical approach.

### **The region in a historical context**

When discussing film and television production in the regions, we must position it in a broader regional and historical context, particularly given Norway's long history of strong regions and countercultures. Norway is a sparsely populated country with great distances between population centres. Changing governments have expressed different levels of commitment to the regions, but it has always remained an important policy goal to sustain and support Norway's distinctively scattered population pattern (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2013).

Norwegian medieval kings who dismissed the regional opposition and failed to secure the consent of the people in all parts of the country were often short lived (Pettersen, Jenssen, & Listhaug, 1996). During the periods of Danish rule (1536–1814) and Swedish rule (1814–1905), the political elites in Oslo met with resistance, especially from the western and northern peripheries. 'A new language, "nynorsk", based on the dialects from the western parts of the country, was launched as an alternative to the urban, semi-Danish language, a religious lay movement outside the state church claimed independence in spiritual matters, and finally, teetotalers organized to guard moral purity, basic welfare and family life' (Pettersen et al., 1996, p. 260). The rural areas became important to the Norwegian nation-building process, and nature and the rural became symbols of the national identity (Cruickshank, Lysgård, & Magnussen, 2009). Existing research shows that Norway has emerged as a country with a tradition of strong local autonomy. I now turn to how its regional policy has evolved over time.

According to Karlsen and Dale (2014) the government represented a strong in-

dustrial and regional political actor after World War II. At first, its policy was exogenous, which means that the state facilitated growth from centre to periphery in order to stimulate modernisation and progress in all parts of the country. Industrialisation in the regions was to a large degree based on natural resources, such as their ores, forests and fish. However, during a period of deindustrialisation in the 1980s, the exogenous regional political strategy was gradually succeeded by an endogenous one. Now, it was determined, growth should come from the regions themselves. The state implemented a restructuring program, the goal of which was to stimulate economic diversification and local mobilisation. By the end of the 1980s, the attention of both researchers and politicians had shifted to what was known as ‘new regionalism’, which abandoned traditional industry in the regions to focus instead on ‘the importance of regional assets, local cultures, and interaction among regional actors in shaping endogenous development and regional growth’ (Karlsen & Dale, 2014, p. 14).

According to Cruickshank et al. (2009), the ‘growth’ discourse in Norwegian policy, which implies that small places are important only if they contribute to economic growth and profitability, is now much more dominant than the ‘intrinsic value’ discourse, which sees value in the rural in itself. In a report about rural and regional political discourses from a historical perspective, Tor Selstad (2003) argues that regional policy has shifted yet further, from a focus on the rural peripheries to the regions with modern cities. How this will impact the scattered population pattern as a policy goal is unclear, but the government has announced a new regional reform, which means that several municipalities need to merge and there will be fewer regions.

To sum up, two national Norwegian tendencies are especially relevant when discussing film and television production in the regions: an increased emphasis on regions and economic growth, and an increased emphasis on size and the city regions.

### **The film and television business in a national context**

Discussing the regions in a national *film* context also touches upon the question of size, because the film and television business in Norway is small. According to a 2014 report on the finances of the Norwegian film business, there are between 1500 and 2000 film workers and 203 active, private companies, including companies producing feature-length films, television drama series and documentaries (Ryssevik et al., 2014). (The report only includes limited liability companies.) Approximately 50 per cent of companies producing feature-length films, 60 per cent of companies producing documentaries, and only 10 per cent of the television companies are located outside the Oslo area. The Norwegian Film and TV Producers’ Association, which is a trade and

employers' association, had 119 members in December 2016.<sup>4</sup> This association includes companies producing films, commercials, games, and television. The regional companies discussed in this thesis do not exist in a vacuum, and in the following two sections, I will address the national film and television business.

### *The Norwegian film business*

Production of film in Norway started in 1911, and over the past one hundred years, the state's attitude towards film has changed fundamentally (Iversen, 2011). From the 1920s through World War II, the state saw film as an unnecessary luxury and subjected it to taxation (Dahl & Helseth, 2006; Iversen, 2013). Later, attitudes changed, and film is now considered to be an important cultural expression, as well as an effective promoter of Norwegian language and identity. As a result, the state now supports the film business, and, in 2001, the government introduced a major film-related reform to address the poor reputation of Norwegian films and their low market share, as well as the economic fragility of the companies which made them (Moseng, 2016). Before, funding had been based on artistic criteria, but the reform introduced a market-oriented grant scheme that was intended to encourage producers to attract private investors (Enerhaug & Larsen, 2013). In addition, the reform underlined the business aspect of film in general (Prop. 1 S (2000-2001)).

The most ambitious film policy in Norwegian history, known as *Veiviseren* [The pathfinder] was introduced in 2007 by the Labour government (Ministry of Culture, 2007). It expressed a renewed commitment to film and put forward ambitious goals and increased public funding. For the first time, regional film was included in the film policy as well. The government's increased commitment to film in the new millennium resulted in the production of more films and an increased domestic market share. Norway has traditionally lagged behind its neighbours, Sweden and Denmark, but in recent years, Norwegian directors such as Morten Tyldum (*The Imitation Game*, 2014) and Tommy Wirkola (*What Happened to Monday*, 2016, and *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, 2013) have even 'made it' in Hollywood. Scandinavian films and film workers are gaining recognition beyond their national borders and international co-productions and co-financing is growing.

Another new film policy, introduced by the Conservative and Progress Party government in 2015, reaffirmed what researchers had described as a new emphasis on economic goals (Enerhaug & Larsen, 2013; Iversen, 2013). While the film policy of 2007 had been artistically ambitious and the result of a commitment to culture, the film policy of 2015 had a stronger focus on the business aspect of film, including private funding

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.producentforeningen.no/medlemsliste.aspx> [accessed 19.12.16].

of film. The government clearly now expects the film business to be more profitable, as a government-initiated report on the economy and financial flow in the film business had indicated that it was not very profitable and struggled with liquidity as well (Ryssevick et al., 2014). Some of the reasons for this are that the number of companies has grown; available resources are spread among more support schemes, including those of the regional film agencies; and the doubling of public funding since 2000 had resulted in increased production activity but not higher budgets (Moseng, 2016). Changes in technology and distribution have also affected the Norwegian film business, as DVDs recede and streaming channels grow.

### *The Norwegian television business*

The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, NRK, was established in 1933. The official start of television broadcasting was in 1960, and NRK's monopoly on that medium lasted until 1981. During the 1980s, Norwegians received access to cable and satellite television. After a period during which local organisations were allowed to broadcast, the commercial broadcaster TV2 was established in 1992 (Bastiansen & Dahl, 2003). TV2 had to guarantee nationwide coverage, and its impact included an increased focus on scheduling, ratings and cost efficiency throughout the business (Syvertsen, 1997). Its main office was established in Bergen, which was important to the local film and television milieu there. The newly established broadcaster represented job opportunities for private production companies, because TV2's concession stated that Norwegian companies should produce at least 50 per cent of its content, and that TV2 itself should only produce news in house. TV2 is organised as an enterprise channel, meaning that it should contribute to the development of an independent production sector in Norway. And, in fact, it propelled the start-up of several private production companies in Bergen, including Flimmer Film, which is one of the cases in this thesis.

After the new millennium, the transition to digital terrestrial television has generated a number of new channels, including web-TV and the introduction of television from media corporations. In 2009, the Ministry of Culture began to require that private companies should produce at least 10 per cent of public-service broadcaster NRK's content, and, beginning in 2018, NRK must spend 40 per cent of its budget on external productions (Ministry of Culture, 2015b). As public service broadcasters, both NRK and TV2 are obliged to represent the whole country, and to strengthen Norwegian culture, language and society. NRK has thirteen *distriktskontorer* (regional offices) in Norway, in addition to NRK Sápmi, which produces journalism for the Sámi population. TV2 has two offices—one in Bergen, the other in Oslo. TV2 argues that it is expensive to keep the main office in Bergen and several moving plans to downsize have been discussed, as TV2 is planning to cut NOK 350 million from its operating budget by 2020.

To conclude, the private film and television business in Norway has grown considerably since 2000. In 2014, the private production business generated 792 million euros in total sales revenue (Moseng, 2016). However, the film and television business as a whole is not very profitable. The feature-film production companies struggle the most, while the television production companies are more economically viable, because many of them are part of transnational entertainment groups and because the Norwegian television market is bigger than its film market (Ryssevik et al., 2014). Globalisation, new technology and digitisation have opened up new markets but also resulted in increased competition. A small number of films tend to get a greater share of the audience as well (Ryssevik et al., 2014, p. 26).

This chapter has placed regional film within a historical and regional context, and I have presented and discussed research on regional film and television. Finally, I have described the national film and television business in order to create a greater understanding of the current situation of the four companies. Policy development affects these companies as well and is therefore the topic of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 3. Policy development and public funding

The European film industry depends on public funding, and the four cases in this study are no exceptions to this rule. Film policy is therefore important to these companies, because the government decides the amount of public funding, the allocation of this funding, and the guidelines for receiving funding. My first article discusses the implementation of regional film policy, and I will not repeat this presentation here but instead offer a short overview of the regionalisation process.<sup>5</sup> How do the local authorities and the state legitimise the funding of regional agencies, and what do they want to achieve? I will also discuss the newest developments in Norwegian film policy and conclude by addressing the public funding of film in a European context.

### Between centralisation and regionalisation

In his thesis concerning the establishment of municipality cinema institutions in Norway, Ove Solum notes that rural areas were very important as the film medium evolved in the beginning of the twentieth century (Solum, 2004). It was a political goal that people should have the opportunity to watch films outside the capital area, and Solum's thesis demonstrates that political discussions concerning centralisation and decentralisation have influenced film policy from the beginning. *Kinolovent* [The film theatres' act] of 1913 emphasises that the regulation and control of films were the government's responsibility, but it also gave the municipalities the opportunity to operate and own local cinemas (Solum, 2004, p. 50). People living in the rural areas were therefore able to watch films, but whether this possibility resulted in more diverse or better films is debatable, because the municipalities did not use much of their earnings surplus to support film production (Iversen, 2013). The ability to achieve profitability was the main argument behind the municipalities' interest in operating the cinema (Solum, 2004, p. 225). Interestingly, this economically motivated argument is also reflected in today's local initiatives from private investors and politicians who want film production to take place in the regions.

However, the regions became an important source of creative inspiration in the 1920s, when a number of filmmakers started producing national romantic films. At this time, the rural areas offered the basis for a focus on Norwegian identity, as represented

<sup>5</sup> The Norwegian government also supports Sámi film production through funding to the International Sámi Film Institute in Kautokeino, Northern Norway. This is not a regional film centre or fund; the institute instead works to enhance and promote Sámi film production in Norway, Sweden, Russia and Finland, and to promote cooperation between indigenous film workers on a global level.

through rural stories, locations, clothing, and architecture (Iversen, 2011, p. 38). In 1948, the state touring movie company, Norsk Bygdekino [Norwegian rural cinema], was established (Bakke, 1994; Iversen, 2013). This move was in line with the dominant rural and regional political discourse regarding the ‘spreading of resources from centre to the periphery’. Instead of supporting film production *in* the regions, the state supported the distribution of film *to* the regions. With the establishment of Norsk Bygdekino, people could watch films in places that did not have regular cinema facilities.

During the 1980s, the political discourse shifted again, in Norway as elsewhere in Western Europe. Now, growth was to come *from* the regions, not from centre to periphery. The regions were lifted up because of their supposedly positive impact on innovation and economic growth, and, therefore, a decentralisation of political power was necessary (Keating, 1998; Langeland, 2012; Porter, 2003). This 1980s wave of regional development in Europe was connected to the emergence of regional authorities with legislative autonomy and power in the area of cultural policy who set up new regional support agencies (Lange & Westcott, 2004, p. 17) the audiovisual industry in Europe is characterized by “a fringe of small under-capitalised firms, especially in the independent production sector, working on a film-by-film basis, facing difficulties to access the funding required for the development of their activities and to create the conditions for a sustainable business model” (Lange & Westcott, 2004, p. 166. The number of regional film funds grew, and the scope of their interventions and their presence in the public arena became increasingly important (Newman-Baudais, 2011, p. 132). However, in contrast to developments elsewhere in Europe, Norwegian film policy remained strongly centralised. For the Norwegian government, it was more important to strengthen and promote a unified, national film business than to commit to regional film. Nation-building was a cornerstone of the argument behind the state’s support of the national film business.

Local film workers initiated the first two regional agencies—Nordnorsk filmsenter [Northern Norway Film Centre] and Vestnorsk filmsenter [Western Norway Film Centre] were established in 1979 and 1994, respectively. The regional film centres are culturally motivated, non-commercial and meant to support short films and documentaries. They also offer courses and other initiatives to build the local film business. Local and regional authorities cover the operational costs, and the state supports the other activities. The regional film funds, on the other hand, invest specifically in feature films and television drama and series. The local and regional authorities cover operational costs, but in order to get state funding, the funds must match the funding 1:1 (Ministry of Culture, 2015a).

After the turn of the millennium, as well, new regional film centres and funds started to pop up. Local and regional authorities and private investors initiated these later



agencies to answer to business interests, not cultural interests (Ryssevik & Vaage, 2011). The initiative-takers hoped that a commitment to film would revitalise regions that had struggled following the general decline of traditional industries, and that it might result in economic activity, jobs and tourism (Gray, 2007; Ryssevik & Vaage, 2011).

The 2001 establishment of the first regional film fund in Lillehammer, Film 3, was a classic example of the way in which the creative industries were thought to contribute to regional development. The region suffered from low employment after the Olympics in 1994, and politicians and private investors hoped that the establishment of Film 3 would boost activity there. Since the city already had the Norwegian Film School, which had been established in 1997, politicians and investors saw potential in film, even though the area had no film business at that point. Film 3 was inspired by the success of the regional film fund *Film i Väst* in Sweden. As I explained in the previous chapter, Norwegians often hold up Sweden as an inspiring example of how film production in the regions can be successful. What is downplayed, however, is that Sweden's decentralisation of film has not changed the localisation pattern of film workers there (Dahlström & Hermelin, 2007).

The following two tables present overviews of Norwegian regional film centres and funds, including offices, year of establishment, catchment area and owners. Maps of the centres and funds appear in the appendix 2 and 3.

*Table 1. The dispersion of regional film centres in Norway, listed in chronological order.*

<b>Film centre:</b>	<b>Office:</b>	<b>Established:</b>	<b>Catchment area:</b>	<b>Owners:</b>
Nordnorsk filmsenter	Tromsø	1979, operative in 1981	Finnmark, Troms, and Nordland counties, comprising 87 municipalities. Population 482 000.	The counties of Finnmark, Nordland and Troms.
Vestnorsk filmsenter	Bergen and Volda	1994	Møre og Romsdal, Sogn og Fjordane, and Hordaland counties, comprising 95 municipalities. Population 892 000.	The municipality of Bergen and the county of Hordaland.
Midtnorsk filmsenter	Trondheim	2005	Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag counties, comprising 48 municipalities. Population 449 700.	The municipality of Trondheim and the counties of Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag.
Filmkraft Rogaland	Stavanger	2006	Rogaland county, comprising 26 municipalities. Population 470 100.	The county of Rogaland and the municipalities of Stavanger, Haugesund and Randaberg.

<b>Film centre:</b>	<b>Office:</b>	<b>Established:</b>	<b>Catchment area:</b>	<b>Owners:</b>
Østnorsk filmsenter	Lillehammer	2008	Oppland and Hedmark counties, comprising 48 municipalities. Population 384 300.	The counties of Oppland and Hedmark, and the municipalities of Lillehammer, Øyer and Gausdal.
Sørnorsk filmsenter	Kristiansand	2008	Vest-Agder, Aust-Agder and Telemark counties, comprising 48 municipalities. Population 470 900.	The municipalities of Kristiansand and Arendal, and the counties of Vest-Agder, Aust-Agder and Telemark.
Viken filmsenter	Drammen	2011	The counties of Buskerud, Akershus, Østfold, Vestfold and, since 2017, Oslo, comprising 74 municipalities. Population 2 065 400.	The counties of Buskerud, Akershus, Østfold, Vestfold and, since 2017, Oslo municipality.

*Table 2. The dispersion of regional film funds in Norway before 2016.*

<b>Film fund:</b>	<b>Office:</b>	<b>Established:</b>	<b>Catchment area:</b>	<b>Owners:</b>
Film 3	Lillehammer	2001	Oppland and Hedmark counties, comprising 48 municipalities. Population 384 300.	The counties of Oppland and Hedmark, and the municipalities of Lillehammer, Øyer and Gausdal.
FUZZ	Bergen	2006	Sogn og Fjordane, Møre og Romsdal and Hordaland counties, comprising 95 municipalities. Population 892 000.	The municipality of Bergen.
FilmCamp	Målselv	2005	FilmCamp invests in projects that place all or most of their production with FilmCamp and/or the region, including foreign productions.	The county of Troms and the municipalities of Målselv, Lenvik, Sørreisa, Berg, Torsken and Tranøy.
Filminvest Midt Norge	Trondheim	2006	Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag counties, comprising 48 municipalities. Population 449 700.	The municipality of Trondheim and the counties of Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag.
Filmkraft	Stavanger	2006	Rogaland county, comprising 26 municipalities. Population 470 100.	Rogaland county, and the municipalities of Stavanger, Haugesund and Randaberg.
Filmfond Nord	Bodø	2012	Finnmark and Nordland counties, comprising 63 municipalities. Population 317 600.	The counties of Nordland and Finnmark.

## The rationale behind the state's funding of regional film

As mentioned, the early rationale for the support of national film in Norway was mostly cultural in nature. When the Labour government implemented regional film as part of its national film policy in 2007, most of the regional film centres and funds were already established. An economic rationale was important to the government's support of regional film agencies—the local and regional owners of the centres and funds should cover the operational costs, and the regional film funds would also mobilise new capital for film production, because the owners had to match the state's allocation (Ministry of Culture, 2007). In this way, the funds would contribute to an increase in the amount of money available to the Norwegian film business as a whole. The government wanted the regional film funds to attract private investors to films. The other governmental rationale was based on the concept of diversity. The hypothesis was that films produced in different parts of the country by local film workers would be various in nature and character.

In 2011, four years after the regional funds were implemented through the government's film policy, the Ministry of Culture asked the company Ideas2evidence to evaluate them. The task was to evaluate whether the funds had succeeded in increasing the amount of capital to the regional Norwegian film business, and whether the funds had resulted in more varied films. The report concluded that the funds had clearly brought more money into the Norwegian film business (Ryssevik & Vaage, 2011). The funds had also strengthened the film business in the regions where they were located and, to a certain degree, contributed to more varied stories, though this was difficult to measure as such. The report emphasised the importance of critical mass—there had to be a certain amount of companies for the business as a whole to thrive. They concluded that the government should prioritise those funds that had the best results, and they repeated this conclusion in Ideas2evidence's 2014 report on the national film business (Ryssevik et al., 2014). This report flatly states that neither the domestic film market nor the amount of public funding is sufficient to develop sustainable film businesses all over the country. Therefore, the report concludes, the government should prioritise those regions with the biggest film businesses and the greatest production activity. Both reports insisted that if the government wanted to contribute to strong film milieus outside the capital, it needed to prioritise fewer regions: 'We do not think it is possible to lift all the Norwegian regions up to a sustainable level, given the size of the Norwegian domestic market' (Ryssevik & Vaage, 2011, p. 104). The results of these evaluations clearly affected the new film policy introduced in 2015.

## The policy of 2015: a commitment to fewer but stronger film regions

The establishment of the new regional film agencies and the implementation of regional film as part of national film policy in 2007 could be described as a regionalisation process. The 2015 policy, *En framtidrettet filmpolitikk* [A provident film policy], which was introduced by the Conservative Party and Progress Party government, clearly stated that the government wanted to strengthen regional film.<sup>6</sup> Chapter 7 of the policy has the title ‘Sterkere regionale filmmiljøer’ [Stronger regional film milieus] and outlines the many regional film policy goals. The overall aim of the public funding of regional film is to

contribute to increased competition, more diversity and better quality for Norwegian films by spreading the power and regionalising the film policy. In addition, the regional film institutions should contribute to developing strong regions within Norwegian cultural life, liberating local power and voices, and giving children and youth an introduction to film culture. (Ministry of Culture, 2015a, p. 65)

In sum, the new policy reveals four goals for regional film:

- 1) To contribute to increased competition. The government wants active, regional film milieus to challenge the dominance of the capital. As mentioned, film policy has long been centralised. It remains to be seen whether the new, regional film funds will result in stronger regional film milieus.
- 2) More diversity. Inherent in this argument is the expectation that regional film production should result in more diverse film expressions, a varied use of locations and people and, in all, better quality and more pluralism of Norwegian film.
- 3) To increase the quality of Norwegian film by spreading the power and regionalising the film policy. Whether the regionalisation of the Norwegian film business improves it or not is a topic of debate. It is not explicit what spreading of power means, and how this in addition to regionalisation will increase the quality of Norwegian film. However, the regional film centres are obligated to build and support local talents and film milieus, and these local talents may contribute to increasing the quality of films.
- 4) Regional film agencies should contribute to developing strong regions in Norwegian cultural life, liberating local power, giving a voice to more people, and introducing film culture to children and youth. These expectations involve

<sup>6</sup> The government also introduced an incentive in the form of a refund-based arrangement for national and international film productions. Many regional film workers had promoted such an arrangement, because big film productions in the regions might result in more work opportunities. I do not discuss the film incentive arrangement in this thesis, because it was implemented in 2016, after my work was largely done.

rural and regional political goals and position culture as an important aspect of life quality and regional strength. They also imply an interest in democracy—people from different parts of the country should be represented and allowed a voice. For example, it has been said that film production in Norway is mostly an activity performed by young men from the western part of Oslo (Ministry of Culture, 2012). Goal number 4 resonates with goal 3, which says that subsidies should promote more diversity in film. Lastly, by introducing the film medium to the younger generation, regional film agencies can contribute to the development of new filmmakers.

To conclude, the government has imposed a broad range of tasks upon the regional film agencies and articulated a range of expectations as to what regional film should achieve. These goals are in addition to the overarching goals for the national film business as a whole:

- 1) Varied films of high quality
- 2) availability/accessibility of films for the audience
- 3) high audience rates, both nationally and internationally
- 4) a professional and sustainable film business (Ministry of Culture, 2015a)

To apply for funding from the Norwegian Film Institute, one must also pass the *Kulturtesten* [Culture test]. This means that the film manuscript must be written in Norwegian or Sámi; its theme must relate to Norwegian history, culture or society; the story must take place in Norway, in countries belonging to the European Economic Area (EEA) or in Switzerland; and the author must live in one of these countries (NFI, 2015b).

The government in 2015 clearly followed the recommendations in the reports from Ideas2evidence and decided to contribute to the development of a few selected and strong film milieus outside the capital. The new policy therefore changed the distribution formula for the regional centres and funds. Instead of focusing on equal allocation, it now emphasised production activity (Prop. 1 S (2016-2017)). The policy stated that the government would only support two or three funds, not all six of the existing regional film funds. As a result, people working at the different regional film funds immediately undertook a consolidation process. In Northern Norway, the counties Nordland, Troms and Finnmark established Filmfond Nord in 2016,<sup>7</sup> and that same year, the fund received 4.887 million NOK in state subsidies. The three counties and Kulturnæringsstiftelsen Sparebanken Nord-Norge [Cultural business foundation

<sup>7</sup> For a geographical overview of the new regional film funds, see appendix 3.

SpareBank 1 in Northern Norway]<sup>8</sup> supported the fund with 6 million, which means that the fund now handles almost 11 million NOK. The CEO's office is in Bodø (Nordland county), while the film consultant's office is in Tromsø (Troms county). FilmCamp in Troms is not part of this new consolidation, and therefore they do not receive public funding from the government anymore.

Moving to mid-Norway and the eastern part of the country, the regional film funds Film 3 in Lillehammer and Filminvest Midt-Norge in Trondheim (mid-Norway) started to work towards a consolidation process after the new policy came about. The fund Filminvest was established in February 2016, and its owners are the four counties of Oppland, Hedmark, Sør-Trøndelag and Nord-Trøndelag, and the two municipalities of Lillehammer and Trondheim. The fund has offices in Lillehammer and Trondheim (the municipalities Øyer and Gausdal, two of the former owners of Film 3, are not owners of the new fund). Filminvest received 5.544 million NOK in state subsidies in 2016.

In Western Norway, the film fund FUZZ in Bergen (Western Norway, Hordaland county) and Filmkraft Fond in Stavanger (Southwestern Norway, Rogaland county) also consolidated in 2016. The new fund, called Mediefondet Zefyr, has two owners: Bergen municipality owns 65 per cent, and Rogaland county owns 35 per cent. Zefyr will cover seven counties: Møre og Romsdal, Sogn og Fjordane, Hordland, Rogaland, Vest-Agder, Aust-Agder and Telemark. Zefyr received 9.570 million NOK in state subsidies for 2016, which is almost twice that of the two other funds. Fuzz's private investors had earlier invested 27.4 million NOK, and the new fund will manage approximately 35 million NOK.

The regional film centres remain the same as before the 2015 policy release, except that the capital, Oslo, became part of Viken film centre in January 2017. Before, Oslo was the only region in Norway without a film centre.

*Table 3. The dispersal of regional film funds in Norway after 2016.*

<b>Film fund:</b>	<b>Office:</b>	<b>Established:</b>	<b>Catchment area:</b>	<b>Owners:</b>
Mediefondet Zefyr	Bergen and Stavanger	2016	Møre og Romsdal, Sogn og Fjordane, Hordaland, Rogaland, Vest-Agder, Aust-Agder and Telemark counties, comprising 152 municipalities. Population 1 832 900.	The county of Rogaland and the municipality of Bergen.

<sup>8</sup> SpareBank 1 is a Norwegian bank alliance of sixteen independent banks from different parts of the country.

<b>Film fund:</b>	<b>Office:</b>	<b>Established:</b>	<b>Catchment area:</b>	<b>Owners:</b>
Filminvest	Lillehammer and Trondheim	2016	Nord-Trøndelag, Sør-Trøndelag, Oppland and Hemark counties, comprising 96 municipalities. Population 834 000.	The municipalities of Trondheim and Lillehammer, and the counties of Nord-Trøndelag, Sør-Trøndelag, Hedmark and Oppland.
Filmfond Nord	Bodø and Tromsø	2016	Finnmark, Troms and Nordland counties, comprising 87 municipalities. Population 482 000.	The counties of Nordland, Troms and Finnmark.

In the national budget for 2016, the government increased public funding of the regional film funds by 8.8 million NOK over 2015, so that the funds received 20 million NOK in all (Prop. 1 S (2015-2016)). Film policy therefore moved in the same direction as regional policy, focusing less on the smallest regions and emphasizing size and urban regions as its locomotives. The government clearly wants the new funds to make money, attract investors and support projects with market potential. Whether this will result in more varied films, which is also a regional film policy goal, remains to be seen. If the point is to increase the amount of money in the funds and attract private investors, the newly established film funds will most likely favour commercial projects with economic potential over artistic projects that do not aim for a large audience. This is partly because the funds want to guarantee that the investors will get their money back, and partly because supported films with good commercial results will contribute with more money to the funds, since the funds can demand a percentage of the film's surplus earnings.

### **The rationale behind public funding in a European context**

Private film and television companies in Norway rely heavily on public funding, which is an important premise for the very existence of film production in Norway, as it is elsewhere in Europe (Lange & Westcott, 2004) the audiovisual industry in Europe is characterized by “a fringe of small under-capitalised firms, especially in the independent production sector, working on a film-by-film basis, facing difficulties to access the funding required for the development of their activities and to create the conditions for a sustainable business model” (Lange & Westcott, 2004, p. 166. European cultural policy is dedicated to the support of cultural diversity and the regional (Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2011, p. 22; McGonagle & Eijk, 2016). In addition, European public policies have paid particular interest to the film and television industries because of economic weakness and the domination of American films and television series (Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2011). The EU has a legal obligation under the UNESCO Convention to protect and promote a diversity of cultural expressions. France also introduced the ‘cultural exception’ concept in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations

with the United States in 1993. The intent was to treat culture differently from other commercial products, and to leave cultural goods and services out of international treaties and agreements (Lange & Westcott, 2004) the audiovisual industry in Europe is characterized by “a fringe of small under-capitalised firms, especially in the independent production sector, working on a film-by-film basis, facing difficulties to access the funding required for the development of their activities and to create the conditions for a sustainable business model” (Lange & Westcott, 2004, p. 166. However, researchers have also noted that the cultural dimension is now less important to EU policy, whereas the market side and an economic growth discourse are becoming more important (Crusafon, 2015).

According to a report from the European Audiovisual Observatory, the audio-visual industry in Europe is characterised by ‘a fringe of small under-capitalised firms, especially in the independent production sector, working on a film-by-film basis, facing difficulties to access the funding required for the development of their activities and to create the conditions for a sustainable business model’ (Lange & Westcott, 2004, p. 166) the audiovisual industry in Europe is characterized by “a fringe of small under-capitalised firms, especially in the independent production sector, working on a film-by-film basis, facing difficulties to access the funding required for the development of their activities and to create the conditions for a sustainable business model” (Lange & Westcott, 2004, p. 166. The European Audiovisual Observatory is a European public service body comprised of forty-two member states. Its main goal is to gather and distribute information on the audio-visual industry in Europe (Newman-Baudais, 2011). The reports ‘Public Funding for Film and Audio-Visual Works in Europe: A Comparative Approach’ (Lange & Westcott, 2004) the audiovisual industry in Europe is characterized by “a fringe of small under-capitalised firms, especially in the independent production sector, working on a film-by-film basis, facing difficulties to access the funding required for the development of their activities and to create the conditions for a sustainable business model” (Lange & Westcott, 2004, p. 166 and, more recently, ‘Public Funding for Film and Audiovisual Works in Europe’ (Newman-Baudais, 2011) offer an overview of the activities of the public bodies funding film and audio-visual works in Europe. Another recent report, ‘Regional and Local Broadcasting in Europe’, sheds light upon current national developments, including funding and regulations (Brogi *et al.*, 2016). According to this report, regional audio-visual media is important for the following reasons: (1) regional media has a closeness to people from the region in question that national and international media lack, and therefore has democratic significance (2) regional media covers regional politics and issues that are underrepresented in national media; and (3) regional media supplies communicative spaces that allow regional identities ‘to be explored, developed, sustained and promoted’ and facilitates intercultural dialogue (McGonagle & Eijk, 2016, p. 12). This last quality is especially important, ac-



ording to the report, because national media sometimes marginalises regional identities and languages. Many regional funds and regional television channels therefore aim to support alternative regional or minority languages.

Despite these evident virtues, the global financial crisis has undermined local and regional television, and public funding is necessary to help these stations cover their costs (Fathaigh, 2016). In addition, local and regional television programmes must deal with competition from international television channels, an audience that is spread across an increasing number of channels, the costs associated with producing original programs, and the very important question of how regional or local the content can be before it causes division between people based on specific cultural or sociological differences (Furnémont & Janssen, 2016).

In 2009, there were 280 public funding bodies for film and audio-visual works in Europe (Newman-Baudais, 2011, p. 9). Regional and local funds increased by forty-seven in the period between 2005 and 2009, making these funds the most dynamic in terms of fund creation. In 2009, there were ninety-seven regional funding bodies in Europe. Cine-Regio, a network of regional film funds in Europe, represents forty-four regional funds spread across twelve states.<sup>9</sup> According to a research report from 2012 (Olsberg), the financial crisis of 2007-2008 led to deep cuts in European state film funding. Charlotte Appelgren, general secretary of Cine-Regio, also says that the financial crisis has led to an increased pressure on public film funding, and that television is paying less, pre-sales have dropped, and private money is hard to come by (Segay, 2010).

This chapter has shown that the European countries, Norway included, use diversity as an argument for supporting their national film business. However, the rationale behind public funding of film has become increasingly economic. The creative industries, regional film and television production included, are an important part of this development because of their supposedly positive impact on economic growth. I will elaborate further upon theories that address economic and cultural aspects of filmmaking in the next chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> See [http://cineregio.org/about\\_cine-regio/](http://cineregio.org/about_cine-regio/) [accessed 11.01.17].



## CHAPTER 4. Theoretical approaches to regional film and television

I position this thesis within the field of production studies, which has received growing interest from media researchers in recent years. This is by no means a field with distinct borders; on the contrary, production studies, as an approach, sprawls in many directions and can be challenging to navigate. This perspective involves ‘creativity within constraints’ and ‘practices within the political economy of labour, markets, and policy’, and it overlaps at times with ‘sociology, anthropology, film and television studies, cultural geography, and communication’ (Mayer, Banks, & Caldwell, 2009a, pp. 2-6). In addition, production studies incorporates media economics, organisational studies and history. This expansiveness allows the researcher to adjust this approach to the specific study she or he will carry out.

In what follows, I will first describe production studies as my approach here. Second, I will outline other theories that have influenced this study, including research on the creative industries, creative work, knowledge-based resources, place and diversity. Third, I will explain how I have implemented these theories as part of my production studies approach to regional film and television.

### Production studies as an overall theoretical approach

The study of media production is, in the words of David Hesmondhalgh, ‘booming’ (2010). One reason is the pace of change in the media industries in the wake of increased commercialism and globalisation, convergence and digitisation (Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Mayer, Banks, & Caldwell, 2009b, pp. 6-7; Puijk, 2016). The production studies approach is especially strong in the United States (Caldwell, 2008; Havens & Lotz, 2012; Lotz, 2014; Mayer, 2011; Mayer, Banks, & Caldwell, 2009b; Perren & Holt, 2009b). Of late, however, it is expanding outside of the United States as well (M.J. Banks, Conor, & Mayer, 2015; Born, 2004; Cottle, 2003; Paterson, Lee, Saha, & Zoellner, 2016a; Spicer, McKenna, & Meir, 2014; Szczepanik & Vonderau, 2013). Due to differences within the respective film and television industries, American researchers are more concerned with commercial aspects, while European studies focus more on art films and public-service broadcasting (Puijk, 2016; Szczepanik & Vonderau, 2013).

The ambition of media production studies is ‘to answer questions about why changes in the media output occur. It is also driven by an interest in understanding the kind of

forces and processes involved in these changes' (Bruun, 2012, p. 43). How media producers represent themselves is hugely relevant in a society where the media holds sway. Media production studies also looks at how researchers represent these representations, or what Banks, Mayer and Caldwell (2009b) call 'the burden of representation'. According to them, production studies needs to address practices within the political economy of labour, markets, and policy. In other words, it must account for the changes that are happening in the industry *and* the individuals who both effect and are affected by them. As Banks (2015, p. 119) argues, the study of production almost demands an integrated analysis 'to stitch together a research method that fits the author's particular area of inquiry rather than conforming to the requirements of a set scholarly sub-discipline'. Banks promotes production studies as an interdisciplinary approach, which allows for studying the relationship between policies and economic conditions, as well as individuals. Since this relationship is important to this thesis as well, I will now turn to the discussion of political economy's focus on structure and the cultural studies emphasis on subjectivity in what follows.

A political economy approach looks at how resources are allocated, whether this allocation favours some parties over others, and how greater equity of resource allocation can be obtained in society (Perren & Holt, 2009a, p. 7). This approach also focuses on 'the interplay between the symbolic and the economic dimensions of public communications' (Murdock & Golding, 2005, p. 60). The ways in which cultural production is financed and organised have consequences for what is being produced, and for the audience's access to and use of it. Mosco (2009) describes a political economy approach as a holistic approach that encompasses history, social change and the power relations that govern the production, distribution and exchange of resources. Theories about political economy emphasise both the commercial and the symbolic aspects of cultural production, in relation to questions of power and social justice (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p. 53). The political economy approach also focuses on historical, political and economic contexts, and, as Douglas Kellner puts it, these contexts are 'constituted by relations between the state, the economy, social institutions and practices, culture, and organizations such as the media' (Kellner, 2009, p. 101).

Political economists have been criticised for studying media industries from afar, 'with expansive breadth but limited detail of the experiences of individual workers' (Lotz, 2009, p. 27). According to Havens, Lotz, & Tinic (2009), the political economy perspective emphasises macro-level structural issues, in turn generating a reductionist view of production and incomplete explanations regarding the role of human agents and creative work. Wasko and Meehan (2013) reject this criticism, however, and argue that political economy involves a wide range and many levels of analysis. In this thesis, the political economy approach allows for a focus on structures, especially how policy

framework determines and affects the work of the companies including the allocation of public funding between centre and periphery.

Recently, researchers with roots in the cultural studies tradition have exerted an influence upon production studies, particularly regarding questions of meaning, power and subjectivity (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p. 54). Cultural studies is characterised by a variety of scholarly orientations, but it usually involves critical scholarship on how cultural power is produced and reproduced, mediated and negotiated, circulated and consumed. Meaning, in this case, is *made*, and cultural power is exercised throughout the process of making texts (encoding) and interpreting texts (decoding) (Hall, 2006).

A number of production studies researchers have applied cultural studies' view of culture as a site of struggle, contestation and negotiation to the media industry itself (Havens et al., 2009). Gramsci's (1971) theories about hegemony have been influential—cultural studies scholars have long been interested in how culture can be used to dominate, but also as a means of counter-hegemony and empowerment. Vicki Mayer, Miranda Banks, and John Caldwell (2009b) use cultural studies as a starting point in their influential book *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*. They see production *as* culture and are interested in 'how media producers make culture, and, in the process, make themselves into particular kinds of workers in modern, mediated societies' (2009b, p. 2). Cultural studies projects concerning media production share three characteristics: they are grounded in questions of power and the ways in which cultural producers inhabit and exercise it; they are interested in 'cultures of production' and the connections between social and cultural conditions of production and the text; and they are interested in the individual agents and everyday interactions of cultural production (Paterson et al., 2016b, p. 9).

Cultural studies scholars have been criticised for overemphasising reception and textual analysis while dismissing the production of culture and the political and economic context (Kellner, 2009). Today, however, many researchers argue that the opposition between cultural studies and political economy has collapsed (Kellner, 2009)—Mayer, Banks and Caldwell (2009b), for example, want to move beyond what they call an unproductive segregation between cultural studies and political economy. They would rather look at how national policies and global markets shape the local sites they study, and this, in turn, involves a focus on the companies and how they work. I agree with Mayer, Banks and Caldwell and find it necessary to recognise broader political economy perspectives upon political and historical context as well as the companies and their work with regional film production.

My own study involves different 'levels of analysis' of media production (Lotz, 2009; Newcomb & Lotz, 2002). The first level includes broader macro studies of policy and

economy and specific industrial contexts. Havens et al. (2009) compare this level to a jet-plane metaphor: the researcher looks down on the subject of interest, studying it from a great distance. A macro perspective is relevant to me because I want to see how the companies function within an economic, political and historical context. This perspective informs chapter 2, where I outline the region and the Norwegian film and television business in a political and historical context; chapter 3, which addresses policy development; and chapter 5, where I briefly present regional film in the three regions where the four companies are located. The macro perspective is most dominant in article 1, however, where I draw upon notions of the creative industries and clusters to describe and discuss the implementation of regional film policy.

The second level of analysis is the production company. This perspective is perhaps the most important to this study, which focusses on film-and television companies and relies upon interviews with fourteen film workers as its main empirical source. I engage with these companies as meaning-making institutions and seek to understand how they act. Havens et al. (2009) describe this level as the helicopter view, given its narrower, more detailed scope in comparison to the macro perspective. This level of analysis is present in all three articles.

The third level involves a focus on individuals. Although I concentrate most on the companies, a micro perspective invites and enables the interviewees in the companies to speak for themselves, introducing their own experiences and meanings in their creative work. While this micro level of analysis is present in all three articles, the last article is perhaps the most engaged—using theories of place, this chapter reveals how the interviewees' experiences of place and place identity impact their work.

So far, I have outlined production studies as an overall theoretical approach. To address the topic of my thesis I have chosen to adjust the production studies approach by incorporating other theories, as we will see below.

## **Creative industries: Economic growth and regional development**

Interest in the creative industries has grown in recent years, and they are now at the centre of a multidisciplinary scientific debate that ranges across areas such as the economy of culture, local development, and creativity and innovation (Lazzeretti, 2013). In this section, I will address the creative industries concept and show how regional film and television land in the midst of two contradictory discourses: the regional development discourse, which regards the creative industries as a driver of development in small places, and the cluster discourse, which emphasises the importance of size, clusters and cities. The creative industries concept is important to this study because it has influenced Norwegian cultural policy and I discuss the relation between companies and film

policy development in article 1.

New Labour in Britain introduced the term ‘creative industries’ after its election victory in 1997. The definition was broad and encompassed, for example, architecture, designer fashion and film. The British government defined creative industries as ‘those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and which have the potential for job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property’ (Department for Culture Media and Sports (DCMS), 1998). Numerous studies have discussed the creative industries as a concept, and in relation to economic growth, innovation and development (Flew, 2003; Flew & Cunningham, 2010; Garnham, 2005; Hartley, 2005; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Pratt, 2005).

Researchers have criticised the implementation of the creative-industries policy on the regional level in the United Kingdom. Jayne (2005) argues that the problem was a lack of strategic planning, best-practice models and empirical research to guide the policymakers. He calls for a creative-industries policy that elaborates on how the creative industries operate; what their workers do and think about during the creation of goods and services; and what the social relations of production and the economic position of workers are (Jayne, 2005, p. 554). Oakley (2004, p. 68) argues that there is a gap between the rhetoric and the almost non-existent evidence base that supports these policies. The Labour government has been criticised for its unrealistic expectations regarding the British film industry as a provider of employment opportunities and knowledge-based jobs. It has also failed to notice that employment in the film industry often involves job insecurity and cost pressure such as low wages (Blair et al., 2001). Jayne (2015) and Oakley (2004) both call for studies that would articulate micro perspectives on the creative industries, and this thesis contributes to filling this gap by offering new empirical research and insights.

Research on the creative industries can be described like the concept itself—ambiguous, broad and difficult to measure. Many studies fail to account for the fact that creative industries include a number of different categories, which exist within specific and different contexts. Few studies focus more narrowly on the individuals and companies that exist within one category. It is difficult to measure to what extent the creative industries actually contribute to regional development, and how they do so. According to Bille (2012), creative industries that depend on public funding do not necessarily contribute to economic growth, and, therefore, one should be critical towards research that presents positive results. What seems obvious is what Gray describes as ‘the “need” for arts and cultural policies to demonstrate that they generate a benefit over and above the aesthetic’ (2007, p. 203).

Of special interest to this project are the ways in which the creative industries concept

involves an emphasis on regional film as an instrument for achieving regional development. This economic growth discourse also makes it possible to criticise the funding of regional film production as *only* a regional development tool, as some in the Norwegian film business are wont to do. An emphasis on economic growth also implies less focus on the cultural, artistic value of regional film. A different perspective on regional film emphasises its professional aspects and intrinsic value, and that is the view articulated by the interviewees in the four regional companies.

### *The cluster discourse*

Studies of the creative industries paradigm and the economics of creativity do not focus on small places alone but also look at creative cities (Florida, 2005; Scott, 2006), clusters and agglomeration (Porter, 2000, 2003) and the creative class (Florida, 2002). Porter (2000) defines a cluster as a geographic concentration of interconnected companies, highly specialised skills and knowledge, institutions, rivals, related businesses and sophisticated customers in a particular nation or region. He argues that clusters 'provide a vehicle to bring companies, government, and local institutions together in a constructive dialogue' (2000, p. 30). Geographic proximity allows for advantages such as access to other companies and competent people, network building, exchange of information and powerful incentives.

Many researchers have underlined the importance of a critical mass – a certain amount of people and companies that work in related businesses – to stimulate the film industry and create new jobs, and they note that the creative industries, including film and television production, tend to cluster in cities and urban areas (Florida, 2006; Power, 2003; Scott, 2006; Turok, 2003). Size is important within the cluster discourse: 'Concentration, localisation and agglomeration of cultural industries in large cities has been taken by many as a sign that dense urban areas, and all that these bring with them, are a major precondition for successful cultural industries' (Power, 2003).

Turok (2003) describes the situation in Scotland and explains why there are no enduring clusters there: there is an insufficient critical mass of skilled people to sustain the specialised services that are necessary for consistent quality throughout the process; a lack of agglomeration economies to sustain a major film studio; a lack of project-based, small productions; and a limited recycling of surpluses because commercial success is rare. As in Norway, the film business in Scotland relies on public funding. According to Turok, this is not a sign of durability. He finds that many film workers appear to be driven by artistic passion, which limits their growth potential. They tend to work on small projects within a specific niche, rather than focusing on products or services offering scale or continuity (Turok, 2003, p. 560).



After reading all the research that focuses on the creative industries as a big city business, one might wonder about the fate of regional film and television production in the smaller, rural areas. After all, regional film policy in the Scandinavian countries, but also elsewhere in Europe, underlines the importance of film production outside the biggest cities (Newman-Baudais, 2011). Nevertheless, little research focuses on the cultural and creative industries impact on rural and sparsely populated regions (Skoglund & Jonsson, 2012).

What research there is reveals a dilemma. While the regional development discourse emphasises that the creative industries can be a vehicle for growth in the regions, the cluster discourse promotes cities and urban areas as representing a precondition for the cultural businesses to thrive. These discourses also reveal how definitions of size, or critical mass, are unclear. Both of these discourses continue to inform policy and influence research even though researchers have criticised the creative industries for being over-sold, for reducing culture to economics, and for making place matter only in terms of economic development (Bilton, 2007; McGuigan, 2009). According to Bilton, the definition of the creative industries is 'manipulated to paint an inviting picture of our social and economic future'. However, as Turok (2004, p. 1079) notes, to discuss how regions can contribute to economic development *is* a useful counterpoint to the abiding portrayal of the regions as burdens on the economy. Yet Turok concludes that one should not over-emphasise the importance of local clusters and city-regions, as well, because it diverts attention from the responsibilities of national institutions for contributing to economic and social development.

### **Creative work and human resources**

Several researchers have pointed out that the growing academic interest in media work has emerged as a response to the neglect of labour analysis within the cultural studies and political economy frameworks (M. Banks, Gill, & Taylor, 2013; Havens et al., 2009; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Many of the production studies of the 1970s were carried out in news organisations and did not account for the problematic sides of creative work, such as insecurity because of the short-term nature of job contracts and long working hours (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Paterson et al., 2016b, p. 4). Interviews with people in the regional film and television business are this thesis' most important empirical source and research on creative work is especially relevant because of the emphasis on the individuals and their working experiences.

As Conor (2013, p. 208) notes, the different academic fields, subfields and traditions that address media production work all attempt to some degree to address and connect macro and micro levels of industrial analysis. The present study is no exception. According to Matt Stahl (2009, p. 54), there are two sets of concerns, subjective and structural,

that are involved in studying media production labour: the social-psychological experience of work, on the one hand, and its political-economic conditions and organisation, on the other. In this thesis, the subjective concern involves how people in the regional film and television production companies find meaning in their work and whether they are able to fulfil their creative ambitions. The structural concern involves the impact of the political and economic framework.

Hartley (2005) describes the positive aspects of creative work and notes that people working in the creative industries are at the forefront of innovation and the use of new technology, among other things. In Richard Florida's (2002) description of what he calls the 'creative class', this kind of work has numerous advantages, including flexible working hours, the reward of being able to work with something you really love, autonomy, and the use of one's creative talents.

Researchers have criticised Florida for painting an unrealistic picture of creative work because they have observed other perceptions of creative labour (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; T. Miller, 2009). Many people in this business work long hours with low pay, and sometimes no pay. Freelancing and project-based work are common. Andrew Ross interviewed people working in new media companies in New York and described them in this way:

What is the profile of this new kind of worker who behaves and thinks like an artist? It is someone who is comfortable in an ever-changing environment that often demands creative shifts in communication with different kinds of employers, clients, and colleagues; who is attitudinally geared towards work that requires long and often unsocial hours; who dedicates their time and energy to distinct projects rather than to a steady flow of production; who exercises self-management, if not self-employment, in the execution of their work, and who is accustomed to a contingent and casual work environment; without overt supervision or judgment from above. (Ross, 2004, p. 144)

Except for the fact that many of my interviewees are owners and therefore do not switch employers all the time, they describe their work in this way as well. Ross (2008) describes what he calls precarious work, thanks to the insecure working conditions. According to Deuze (2007, p. 173), precarious work is mostly freelance, project-based, and characterised by continual transformation and shifting uncertainties, unpredictable income, and the constant negotiation of a complex network of industry players. Deuze notes that there are more interested people than there are jobs, which makes it even harder to find work and manage a career in film and television. Research into clusters demonstrates that many film workers choose to live in cities because of the access to job opportunities, skilled people and services (Deuze, 2007; Florida, 2005; Porter, 2000; Scott, 2006). In addition to aspects such as insecurity and long working hours, 'self-exploitation' is an important concept in critical discussions about creative work. The workers become so attached to their work and its creativity, self-fulfilment and

positive aspects that they, in effect, exploit themselves.

Theories of creative work offer a micro perspective which is relevant when one is looking at regional film workers and the meaning of their work. I have applied notions of creative work when asking how companies survive in this difficult business. In article 2, I apply a resource-based perspective to explore this work and the factors that help film workers survive and achieve their goals. Companies vary in their ability to take advantage of their resources (Barney, Wright, & Ketchen, 2001; Conner, 1991). A resource-based perspective focuses on what advantages the companies may or may not realise if they utilise their resources effectively (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). Miller and Shamsie (1996) distinguish resources as property-based or knowledge-based. Property-based resources include long-term contracts, equipment or exclusive rights to for instance a manuscript. Knowledge-based resources include competence and implicit knowledge, creative resources, skills or the company as a brand. The entrepreneurship of the owner, including proactivity and a willingness to take risks, is often an important resource for small companies as well (Runyan, Huddleston, & Swinney, 2006). In addition to research that emphasises individual assets, theories that address social capital, networks and trust among local film workers are also relevant when one examines the knowledge-based resources of small, regional film companies. Exchange of information and services are examples of social capital (Cooke & Wills, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Although I acknowledge that external factors also impact these companies, a focus on internal, knowledge-based resources recognises the companies' artistic, non-profit-oriented goals as well. In this sense, I use the knowledge-based perspective to represent a counterweight to research that concentrates on large firms with profit-based strategies.

### **The local and global: Discussions concerning place and diversity**

In addition to the political and economic structures and theories of creative industries and clusters covered in article 1, and the narrower focus on knowledge-based resources and agency covered in article 2, my thesis examines the relationship between the companies and their geographical location in article 3. Place is an important concept here, because of the assumption that film and television production at different places represents diversity and therefore contributes to democracy and varied representations of Norwegian society and culture. Diversity brings up questions such as these: Who is allowed a voice? Which stories are told? Discussions on diversity in film and television often address representations of women, black people and minorities, but studies of film and television productions also encounter a spatial dimension of diversity. For the purposes of this study, I focussed on regional cultural diversity and the importance of representations of people and stories from smaller places, not only the big cities.

The importance of place has gained significance not only in human geography but also in other fields as well, including film studies (Hallam & Roberts, 2013). This shift is due to globalisation and global flows of people, ideas and capital (Appadurai, 1996). Discussions of the global and local touch upon questions of whether global culture has a homogenising effect on local culture, whether regional production companies produce something inherently different from big-city companies, and whether they have the autonomy to realise the advantages and opportunities of their place. According to Bjørkås (2002), three perspectives dominate research on the local and the global. The first view sees place and the local as less important because of globalisation - that is, Western and especially American culture has overwhelmed the world and resulted in cultural uniformity. This perspective does not leave much hope for regional film and television as providers of diversity. The second view claims that globalisation *promotes* diversity, because the flow of ideas and cultural openness inspire new creations and make different cultural expressions available to a larger audience. The third perspective decides that the local and the global are mutually influential: 'glocalization', Robertson (1995, p. 29) argues, 'captures the dynamics of the local in the global and the global in the local'.

I acknowledge the forces of globalisation but agree with Robertson, who argues that the local and global are interconnected forces, and that ideas, practices and performances undergo a process of cultural translation. (Robertson, 1995). This means that I try to interpret the peripheral voices on its own terms - the regional companies' goals and strategies are both a result of autonomous choices *and* surrounding structures such as international broadcasters and distributors' demands, funding guidelines and policy development.

Bondebjerg and Redvall (2015) argue that it is important to cultivate diversity in the audio-visual industries, including an acknowledgment of the plurality of nations, regions, languages and traditions in the world and an active rejection of commercial homogenisation. However, they also problematize a focus by film policies on diversity, because this can come to fetishize a nationally fragmented Europe and, more practically, result in a 'lack of a strong production and distribution network covering Europe' (2015, p. 1). This is a Gordian knot in regional film production, and in film production in Europe in general: to build strong film milieus while at the same time guaranteeing pluralism and diversity.

These various approaches to the local and global have informed this project, because geographical location is a starting point for discussing regional filmmaking, and because the thesis focuses on how place affects four companies. For example, the companies act within local, national, and global frames, including production strategies that promote 'universal' themes but with a place or culturally specific touch (Rao, 2010; Sklan, 1996). Several researchers have addressed national and regional film and television in relation to

cultural identity, diversity and internationalisation (Cunningham, 1994; Sklan, 1996; Tinic, 2005). All of the companies discussed in this thesis necessarily experience the dilemma of telling a universal story from a local point of view. Local or cultural-specific elements are important parts of applications for funding from regional film centres and funds and the NFI, but if one wants to interest international broadcasters and distributors, the project must also be relevant to an international audience. The export of television formats such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* shows how the global and universal are connected: ‘Globalization has nurtured the formation of a cosmopolitan class of industry professionals who, from New York to New Delhi, increasingly share similar concepts and attitudes about “what works” and “what doesn’t” in commercial television’ (Waisbord, 2004, p. 364).

Research also relates geographical location to identity, authenticity, and sense of place or placelessness. Sörlin (1999) focuses on how articulations of landscapes shape national and regional images and identities and form the collective image of a country. In terms of the construction of a national film culture, it is necessary for both centre and peripheries to be aware of ‘a plurality of overlapping and competing discourses within which individuals and groups identify themselves and others in different ways at different times’ (McIntyre, 1985, p. 70). Thus, audio-visual representations are important in a nation-building context. The European Union’s motto for media and film policy, ‘unity in diversity’, tries to capture the uniqueness of each country while at the same time embracing a common European culture. As Sassatelli (2015, p. 28) notes, it balances between competing narratives: How does one secure pluralism and cultural richness within a country and at the same time promote a common, if imagined community at the national level? As I show in chapter 3 and article 1, nation-building, or what Benedict Anderson (1991) describes as an ‘imagined community’ (a constructed feeling of nationhood and collective identity), has been a guiding principle within film policy in Norway.

In an article about regional film production centres in North America, Chris Lukinbeal discusses different types of locations and different uses of landscape in productions (2004). When the location used ‘doubles’ for another location, the place is ‘placeless’. The landscape is space, and the production’s emphasis is on narration and dialogue, not scenery. These kinds of productions are often ‘economic runaways’ that were moved to a cheaper place to film. A creative runaway allows the story to determine the production location, and, as a result, there is more geographic realism in the production (Lukinbeal, 2004, p. 309). Lukinbeal and Zimmermann (2006) also address what they describe as the ‘crisis of representation’ in the tension between the copy (or stand-in) and the original: ‘Why bother with authenticity when people can travel to Las Vegas and praise the fake Venice or New York while pointing out that it’s much better than the real place?’ (Lukinbeal & Zimmermann, 2006, p. 322).

## **The production studies approach taken here**

My production study approach must address the complexity of the economic, political, industrial, organisational and creative practices that shape many media industries (Havens & Lotz, 2012, p. 3). To address this complexity, I have incorporated the following perspectives.

First, theories of the creative industries and clusters include two competing discourses that influence regional film: the regional development discourse and the cluster discourse. Neither of these discourses emphasise the importance of regional filmmaking as a promoter of professionalism and quality in film, but they do influence policy development and therefore represent important perspectives on regional film.

Second, theories of creative work and knowledge-based resources enable a micro approach and a focus on the companies and their work. As such, they complement the broader, more macro-oriented perspectives of the creative industries. In addition, they allow for an exploration of the companies that transcends the instrumentalist view (Gray, 2007), focusing on the companies' goals and internal assets.

Third, the specific geographic location of a production workspace is important when researching regional film production. My production studies approach involves examining theories of place and the relationship between the centre and the margins of media production—that is, 'the specificities of local production communities and the history of their interaction alongside the constantly changing intricate relationships of these locales to the increased scattering of media capitals such as these across the globe' (M. J. Banks, 2015, p. 123). Recently, the geography of production has attracted more attention from media production researchers (McNutt, 2015; Tinic, 2005; Venegas, 2009). For example, in the book on production studies by Mayer, Banks and Caldwell (2009b), part 3, 'Production Spaces: Centers and Peripheries', focuses entirely on how place and space affect media production. However, many of these studies concentrate on runaway productions rather than the actual regional film production workers and companies and the places where they are located.

Summing up, I agree with Newcomb and Lotz, who argue that it is necessary 'to acknowledge the extraordinary range of levels of influence, from the broadest structural arrangements to the most particular creative or administrative decisions made. It is the interdependence of these factors which, above all, defines media production practices' (2002, p. 66). As Lotz points out elsewhere, few such studies exist, because they pose both methodological and theoretical challenges. I have limited my research to a national context, and to three regions, because studies of specific media industries usually narrow the focus to a particular national context and a particular industry within that context (Lotz, 2009). Of course, the film and television companies do not exist in a vacuum,

and a narrow focus is 'challenging given the interconnections among media industries and the important role of international or at least geocultural regions in the production and circulation of the goods they produce' (Lotz, 2009, p. 27).

Finally, I agree with Hesmondhalgh (2010, 2013), who emphasises that it is not enough to describe a phenomenon; production studies researchers should also aim at integrating an explanatory framework which considers structural factors and acknowledges 'conflict over control and autonomy in the work situation' (Elliot, 1982, p. 147). This perspective is a good starting point for the methodological approach in this study, which I elaborate upon in the next chapter.





## CHAPTER 5. Research strategy and methodological approach

The media industries include a rich variety of study objects, and the methodological approaches differ considerably. Examples include fieldwork in Hollywood (Powdermaker, 1950; Rosten, 1941) and in smaller production companies (Zoellner, 2015); observation in the BBC and the American television industry (Born, 2004; Gitlin, 2000); studies of productions (Kjus, 2009; Levine, 2009; Redvall, 2013); studies of texts that are circulated by production personnel (Caldwell, 2009); case studies of film production in a historical and political context (Szczepanik, 2013); and policy document analysis and interviews with people working in the regional film business (New-singer, 2010).

Case studies are now a familiar approach within media industries research and supply the starting point for this thesis as well. I use case studies to explore four production companies who have their bases in the regions. I will elaborate upon case studies and my research strategy in this chapter, including my discussion of selection criteria and a presentation of the four chosen companies. Qualitative interviews represent my main empirical source, and documents represent additional sources. I will present my exploratory, interpretive approach, place the study within a hermeneutical tradition, and conclude by discussing my position as a researcher.

### Case study as an approach

A case study may involve different kinds of methodological approaches and often a combination of methods. Using a variety of empirical sources, instead of just one, may help the researcher to expose and understand multiple facets of a phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Yin (2014, p. 16), the goal of a case study is to examine ‘a contemporary phenomenon (“the case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident’. The four companies that I have examined consist of people who work within a creative business, but creativity does not exist in a vacuum—research needs to place these individuals and their work within a broader context (Caldwell, 2008; Csikszent-mihalyi, 2014; Ettema & Whitney, 1982).

For the purposes of the thesis, four companies constitute the cases, and the main empirical source of knowledge are qualitative interviews with people working in these

companies. Magazine and newspaper articles, interviews with people at regional film agencies, policy documents and reports, funding guidelines, films and websites are additional sources that provide information concerning the companies and their contexts. In this study, context refers to historical, economic, political and institutional frameworks, but also the local film community and network, because these regional companies are part of a national and local film business. The local film context includes institutions such as film festivals, educational institutions, local support (for example, private investors and funds) and regional film agencies. On a national level, film policy sets important premises for Norwegian production companies in general, based on its articulated priorities, amount of funding, and changing level of commitment to film. Obviously, developments in the international film and television industry also affect the production companies in the regions, including anything from a global economic crisis to shifting trends in formats or other technological changes. Choosing the case study as approach enabled me to map the companies within this broader context and do in-depth analyses on a few, selected cases.

### **The purpose of the study and the approach taken here**

According to Baxter and Jack, the purpose of a given study should guide its case study design (2008). The research question is the starting point for all methodological issues and decisions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Is the purpose of the study to explore, explain or describe, to compare cases based on a multiple case study, or to engage in a single case study?

This thesis explores how companies relate to their geographical location and what the advantages and disadvantages of a regional location are. This overall research topic benefits from positioning within a broader framework, and I use the case study as a research strategy for discussing the dialectic relationship between these companies and the context. According to Flyvbjerg, 'predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs'; these studies require an awareness of context (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 224).

Allowing for the fact that regional film, like human behaviour, is a hybrid phenomenon, the present study calls for a broad research strategy. An abiding issue is how the study frames the relation between the objective conditions for media production and the work done by the professional production companies (Bruun, 2016, p. 135). Is the production of media content determined by macro-level structural forces, such as political, economic, or technological forces, by meso-level organisational forces, or by micro-level forces such as individual creativity and autonomy? As Bruun (2016) notes, the assumptions that respond to these questions have implications for the study's interviews, and for the researcher's classification of the interviewees as powerless victims or powerful

human agents. As I explained in the previous chapter, this thesis examines the dynamic *between* structures and human agents. Its starting point is, therefore, what Havens et al. (2009) describe as ‘grounded institutional case studies’, which serve best to uncover the relationship between the macro level, including the economic and political framework, and the micro-level experiences of cultural workers.

The case study here involves a combination of exploration, description and explanation, and the present research drew upon four cases, which makes it a multiple case study. The thesis *explores* film and television production in the regions without a clear proposition, or hypotheses, yet it does have a purpose (Yin, 2014, p. 30). Because relatively few studies of regional film and television companies in Norway exist, I found it important to be open-minded and not bounded by one specific proposition.

A *descriptive* and *explanatory* approach is also important and necessary to this study in relation to the necessary background, historical development and situational context of regional film and television, as well as the implementation of regional film policy, as I discuss in article 1. An explanatory approach seeks to identify links among the four *regional* production companies and the objective conditions that affect their work. The interviewees possess non-public or insider knowledge, and the goal of the interviews is ‘to offer explanations of media content characteristics and developments that neither media system analysis nor textual and audience analysis are able to provide’ (Bruun, 2016, p. 135).

Although there are numerous successful single case studies, multiple-case studies are generally stronger (Yin, 2014). By using four cases, I construct a basis for comparison but remain able to engage at length, achieving both breadth and depth of perspective. Comparative analysis is challenging here because the regional film and television business is diverse in terms of size, geographical location and access to funding. This does not mean that the findings in this thesis are not relevant to other regional companies and film workers. Comparative analysis is valuable because it sensitises us to variation (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 2).

## Case studies and generalisations

A common criticism of case studies is that the specificity of the case does not provide a base of comparison. Those studies often involve survey methods (Deuze, 2007; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Several researchers have emphasised that case studies should be carried out so that they provide a basis for generalisation and transferability (Andersen, 2013; Thagaard, 2003, p. 187). In my situation, however, it may not be possible to generalise using research on regional film and television companies. Each region is different geographically, and the size of the businesses varies, and access to private money and the

amount of public funding are inconsistent as well. Even the goals of the companies are different. I find, therefore, that statistical generalisation is not necessarily a primary goal of my project.

It is also difficult to generalise about companies in the film and television industry because they produce and circulate experiences and cultural expressions (Lampel, Shamsie, & Lant, 2006, p. 6). David Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 4) describes people in the cultural industries as symbol creators, because they impact our understanding and knowledge of the world. This means that the value of their products is determined by the interpretation of symbolic meanings by individual consumers, which makes the value of symbolic goods unpredictable and subjective (Bilton, 2007, p. 138). In addition, the people working in the production companies have *their* opinions regarding what they should produce and what the products should look like, based on their preferences and professional values within the film field.

None of this is to say that the case study is less valuable than another approach. A rich case study reveals important information and implications for further research and it offers intimate perspectives on the companies. It is important to note that while quantitative analyses based upon large sample groups may also produce interesting findings, these macro perspectives suffer from a considerable distance from the actual object of study, and from a lack of feedback from those studied. As Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 237) puts it, generalisation is not always an end in itself. The overarching research question should guide the research strategy, and a quantitative approach would not respond to the goal of supplying context-dependent knowledge based on engagement with the actual companies and the people within them.

Discussions about case studies and their lack of generalisation arise from positivism's quest for the universal. According to Yin (2014), case studies should not be seen as fodder for statistical generalisation. They do not function like a survey, the generalisations of which are based on a much larger number of respondents.

The object of the social sciences and humanities is to *understand* what is studied, and this implies understanding the surrounding context, both historical and current, as well (Willis 2007: 53). The empirical tradition, on the other hand, hopes to generalise based on natural science methods. In my case, instead of privileging breadth, I wanted to privilege at least a certain degree of depth and look at the variation among a few selected production companies. The insight I gain is not necessarily transferable, but important issues, understandings and nuances arise nevertheless. I will elaborate upon my interpretive exploratory approach later in this chapter.

## Selecting cases

To study film and television production in the regions is to acknowledge the differences among those regions while remaining open to their similarities as well. The regional film milieus are small compared to the milieu in Oslo, and most of the regional companies have few employees. Profitability is not a key feature of this work, nor is it necessarily the main goal for the people who do the work. As a result, economic success, or profitability, did not factor in my choice of cases. The economic situation goes up and down for these companies, as it does for their peers in Oslo. Also, because the practice of these companies is project based, annual results are a poor indication of general health or viability. They seldom enjoy any economic buffer outside of public funding and the income that derives from selling screening rights to television companies and distribution companies.

Each of the four companies chosen for this study stands out in a different way. I based my selections on the following criteria:

The purpose of the case study is to maximise the utility of information from the cases, meaning that they must offer solid prospects for interesting inquiries (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). My four cases, that is, are *information rich*. Because the four companies have existed for several years, the people working there will draw upon a decent amount of experience. Because of my main research interest in the advantages and disadvantages of being located in the regions, I wanted to concentrate on cases that would supply as much perspective as possible.

The ability to *survive* in this competitive regional environment is quite an achievement and requires a broad repertoire of competence and know-how, and it was therefore an important criterion for selecting my cases. I wanted to look at companies that had survived for at least five years. Given that most of the Norwegian film business remains in Oslo and Akershus, and that a large part of the public funding goes to companies that are based there, it is a particular achievement to survive outside the capital. Because many private film and television companies in Norway do not survive beyond one year, my selections are *exceptional or deviant cases*. While three of the companies are relatively longstanding, Mer Film had been up and running for only three years when I first started my work. Mer Film is an unusual case because of the results it has achieved in a relatively short time, including several film productions, international recognition and co-productions with critically acclaimed directors and production companies. I will return to Mer Film and the other companies in the next section of this chapter.

All the selected companies have *several employees*. I excluded companies with just one employee. Except for Flimmer Film, which is larger, the companies have two to four employees each. All four companies work with freelancers and hire extra people on a

project- by-project basis.

All four companies have done *several productions*, and they have achieved *creative success*—their films have received good reviews or won prizes, and they have participated in prestigious film festivals such as Cannes or Berlin.

Obviously, all four companies are located *outside Oslo*. Beyond this, however, they represent *varied cases* from *different regions*, for reasons discussed throughout these chapters. I chose Tromsø and Northern Norway because it is furthest from Oslo. Bergen and Western Norway comprise the largest and most active film region outside Oslo, and this region tries to ‘challenge’ the Oslo dominance. Lillehammer and the Inland region are close to Oslo, but, in contrast to Northern Norway and Western Norway, this area has not been a film region for long. (In addition, a company from the Inland region was a criterion when I applied for the PhD position at Lillehammer University College.)<sup>10</sup>

I also wanted to explore differences and similarities among the companies. If four companies that belong to three different regions share certain characteristics, it is likely that other regional companies might share them as well.

*Format* was another criterion. Feature film is the most important area within film policy in Norway, but very few regional production companies do feature film. I chose two companies who have feature film as their main goal: Mer Film has established itself as a successful production company, while Filmbin was the first Norwegian company to commit to films for children and youth. Many regional companies produce documentaries, on the other hand, including the other two choices here: Flimmer Film and Original Film. Original Film has now produced its first feature film, *Oskars Amerika* (2017). I also wanted to study companies that mainly produce film and television, as opposed to commercials. While Flimmer Film does produce commercials, and Filmbin takes on other kinds of contract work, these projects are secondary to film and television. Risk diversification is a typical strategy in this business (Olsberg, 2012), so Flimmer Film and Filmbin are representative cases in that sense.

## **A presentation of the companies**

I will now introduce the four film and television production companies that constitute the cases. Appendix 1 shows where the four companies have their offices. During the project period, some people left the companies, and others arrived, which is normal in a business characterised by change.

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<sup>10</sup> Lillehammer University College merged with Hedmark University College in 2017 and is now called Høyskolen i Innlandet/Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences.

### *Original Film*

Original Film was established in Tromsø, Northern Norway, in 1997, and therefore boasts a long history in the film and television business. Five film workers from Northern Norway founded the company, though none of them work there today.

At the time of the project interviews in June 2014, there were two employees at Original Film. Original Film has eight shareholders and a board of four people with expertise in economics and business, as well as the film business. Original Film produces documentaries, short films and television series and has a strong regional affiliation. It seeks to produce 'universal stories from a local point of view' (Steffensen, interview). The company's biggest production and greatest achievement is the television series *Hjerterått* (2013) for NRK's channel for children, NRK Super. The production budget was approximately 20 million NOK, and it is NRK Super's biggest production so far. Original Film has produced numerous documentaries and shorts and has won several prizes for their films, including an Amanda<sup>11</sup> for best Norwegian short film, *Varde* (2008). The short film *Levi's hest* [Levi's horse], written and directed by Torfinn Iversen, premiered at the prestigious Berlin film festival in 2012. Iversen and Original Film have now produced their first feature film, *Oskars Amerika*, which has been a company goal for several years. The film will premiere in 2017. It is a film for children and youth based on *Levi's hest*.

### **Interviewees**

Producer Mona Steffensen started working for the company in 2004. The company relies on her stamina and long experience. Mona is fifty-one years old and hails from Skjervøy, Northern Norway.<sup>12</sup> She started in the film business by coincidence, after working as a project manager in public administration. Though she lacked experience in the film business, it is project based and therefore attracted her: 'I use to say that I shall love a project even when I hate it. Sometimes you hate it because it is so difficult. But I have always liked challenges. It is fascinating, to build a project from nothing, to organise the team and put together the competence, and to build this house that I call a film project. I learn so many new things all the time. It is tough but if you like these hopeless challenges, then this is the perfect business to be in' (interview).

Former CEO and producer Eric Kama Steinberg (age fifty-five) is from Tromsø, Northern Norway, and started working for Original Film in 2013. Steinberg had previously worked in commercials and news production. According to Steinberg, serving as a CEO and producer in the film business was the most difficult job he had ever had,

<sup>11</sup> The Amanda Award is a Norwegian film award that is given annually at the Norwegian International Film Festival.

<sup>12</sup> Ages of all employees are as of 2017.

because of the complexity and instability of the business—for example, one can devote a lot of time to applications for funding and never receive any (interview). Eric left Original Film to work for his own media production company in 2015.

Biret Ravdna Eira started working for the company in 2015, as a producer assistant.

### *Tromsø and Northern Norway as a film region*

Northern Norway is the largest film region in the country, geographically speaking. It is also the oldest after Oslo (Rysevik & Dahle, 2015, p. 9). It consists of the counties Finnmark, Troms and Nordland. The region has many documentary and short-film producers (both companies and freelancers). In addition to the International Sámi Film Institute, there is a regional film centre, a regional film fund and a regional resource centre. Tromsø is where most of the film workers are located, and most of the funding from Nordnorsk filmsenter [Northern Norway Film Centre] goes to film workers in Troms county (NNFS, 2015). Tromsø hosts the biggest film festival in Norway, Tromsø International Film Festival, which features a program called Film from the North. It shows films produced in the region and the polar area, including Alaska and Sibir. Tromsø also hosts a film festival for children. Finnmark hosts the Nordkapp filmfestival, a small event that shows films from the global northern region. Both Tromsø municipality and Troms county are receptive to the film business, and the municipality also supports Tvibit, a competence centre where young people can develop their interest in film through various projects.

The art and film school in Nordland county has produced many regional film workers, including Ole Giæver, director of *Out of Nature*, which was produced by Mer Film. The University of Tromsø also offers a media production studies program. The challenge for the film business in Northern Norway is the great geographical distances. On the positive side, the film business there has ample access to regional, private funding from, for example, Kulturnæringsstiftelsen SpareBank 1 Nord-Norge [Cultural business foundation SpareBank 1 Northern Norway] and the Norwegian Barents Secretariat. Finnmark county also supports a yearly film scholarship for which local film workers can apply. According to Tor Vadseth, leader of Nordnorsk filmsenter, funding applications have revealed an increased professionalization in the regional film business there (interview).

According to a report that maps the film business in Northern Norway, there are around 200 film workers and 150 companies, and only nine of the companies have more than two employees (Rysevik & Dahle, 2015). The report also reveals that the wage level among film workers in Northern Norway is low, and that the economic growth there is the lowest per employee in the Norwegian film business. Many of the companies are located far from each other, meaning that the amount of cooperation is



necessarily limited, and the report therefore advocates for clusters and network building. On the other hand, recruitment is good, the film workers are young and enthusiastic, and the local and regional authorities are supportive (Ryssevik & Dahle, 2015).

### *Mer Film*

Producer Maria Ekerhovd established Mer Film in Tromsø in 2011, after serving for several years as a producer for other companies. Ekerhovd gained recognition as a producer for the short film *Sniffer*, which was the first Norwegian film to win the Palme d'Or at Cannes film festival (in 2006).

Mer Film seeks to produce arthouse films, features and short films, and they look for talented directors who want to tell stories that take place in either Northern or Western Norway. Today, Mer Film actually consists of three different companies. Ekerhovd established a second firm, Mer Film i Vest in Bergen, Western Norway, in 2012, in order to apply for regional funding from both Northern and Western Norway, since funding guidelines often require that the applicant be located in the region. A third company, Mer Film distribusjon, started up in 2014 to distribute the company's own films and 'champion films from emerging talents who are telling stories in a distinct and compelling way'.<sup>13</sup>

Since its initial establishment in 2011, Mer Film has achieved quite remarkable results, completing six feature films, five short films and five co-productions with acclaimed directors such as Wim Wenders and Amat Escalante. The number of employees has increased from one to seven. The films have received good reviews and have been screened at prestigious film festivals, such as Toronto and Berlin.

### **Interviewees**

Maria Ekerhovd (age forty-one) from Bergen is the owner of and a board member on all three companies while working every day as a producer. She started as a producer in 1999, after finishing film and television studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim. When she established Mer Film, she already had several projects to her credit with her former company, Kong Film in Tromsø. She states, 'My ambition was to create a company that focuses on quality and on making artistically ambitious films, and to focus on the directors that we choose to work with, and with the region as a starting point—Western Norway and Northern Norway' (interview).

Øistein Refseth (age thirty-four) from Elverum, eastern Norway, runs the distribu-

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.merfilm.no/about-merfilm/> [accessed 15.12.16].

tion company Mer filmdistribusjon and is the other board member, together with Ekerhovd. Refseth previously worked at Arthouse, a distribution company for art films. He has a master's degree in media studies from the University of Oslo and first started at Mer Film in 2014 in Bergen. Recently, he relocated to Oslo, because a lot of the work related to distribution happens in Oslo, including press screenings and meetings with directors and collaborators/co-producers (interview).

Ragna Nordhus Midtgard (age twenty-nine) from Tromsø, Northern Norway, works as a producer, along with Ekerhovd. Midtgard was educated as a producer at the Norwegian Film School in Lillehammer and started at Mer Film in 2012. She concentrates on directors and projects with a focus on Northern Norway: 'It is difficult to answer why I do not want to live in Oslo, but I started working with film because I want to tell a story, and you usually want to tell something that you are interested in yourself, something that inspires you when you see it at the cinema. I come from Northern Norway and I want to tell stories from that area' (interview).

Siv Dyb Wangsmo (age thirty-three) from Bergen works as a chief financial officer. She studied at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (NHH) and has a master's degree in economics from the University of Bergen. After her studies, Wangsmo worked for six months at an insurance company before she started at Mer Film in 2013. She wanted to work in the cultural industries, and Ekerhovd hired her to oversee practical arrangements and business on a daily basis so Ekerhovd could focus entirely on creative projects (interview).

Aida LiPera and Elisa Fernanda Pirir started working for the company after I conducted my interviews in 2014. LiPera takes care of acquisitions and co-productions, and Pirir works as a producer. Axel Helgeland (age seventy-two) has worked as an executive producer at Mer Film since 2011–12 and is also on the board of Mer Film and Mer Film i Vest. Helgeland is an award-winning film producer and important advisor to Ekerhovd.

### *Flimmer Film*

This company was founded in 2000 in Bergen, Western Norway, by Lars Løge, Johnny Holmvåg, Christer Fasmer and Eivind Tolås, who met as media students at the University of Bergen. Three things gave rise to the start-up. First, as part of their studies, the four students produced short films that received good reviews. According to producer Johnny Holmvåg, this convinced them that a career in the film business was something they wanted to pursue. Second, the digital revolution within the world of production equipment made cameras and editing equipment affordable, so they did not need a lot of capital to be able to start producing. Third, the national broadcaster TV2 was estab-

lished in Bergen in 1992 and immediately represented a potential client for productions from the regional production companies. Flimmer Film produced its first documentary, *Praha 2000*, for TV2, in 2000.

Flimmer Film has about ten employees, though the work is project based and some of the employees work part time. At the most, fifty people have worked at Flimmer Film during busy periods. The company produces documentaries and documentary series for television and cinema, and they have a commercial department where they produce commercial films. Flimmer Film's productions are varied, and their slogan is 'some films should be made because they are important, others because they are fun'.<sup>14</sup> Many of their films have won prizes both nationally and internationally, including *Drone* (2015), *Sunshine Superman* (2015) and *Asylbarna* [Children deported] (2015).

### Interviewees

Lars Løge (age forty) was one of the founders and worked as a producer from 2000 to 2016, the last three years at what the founders refer to as the 'rural office' in Oslo. He has a background in media studies at the University of Bergen and hails from Kristiansand, Southern Norway. In 2016, he left Flimmer Film and established the production company Volt Film while starting as a documentary consultant for NFI in Oslo. About the start-up of Flimmer Film, he says, 'The first years were really about pure will—this was what we wanted to do, and we were young, hungry, and we wanted to tell about what engaged us. It was hard work, but sometimes you need some luck. When TV2 let us produce our first documentary, it was a foot in the door—we got the opportunity to show our production on television' (interview).

Johnny Holmvåg (age forty-four) has worked as a producer since the founding of the company in 2000 and has a background in media studies at the University of Bergen. He is originally from Harstad, Northern Norway. As a company founder, he states, 'God knows how many times I have thought, "I am fed up—I do not want to do this anymore". A journalist asked me if I would do it all over again. That's a difficult question. If I were asked to establish a new company again now, I would say no way. I would not use the rest of my life doing that. But at some point, you have spent so much time on this company, you cannot just abandon it' (interview).

Eivind Tolås (age forty-two) works as a director and develop projects for the company. He was a founder and also has a background in media studies at the University of Bergen. Tolås is from Sunnmøre, in the western part of Norway. He says, 'The company is kind of a tool, a platform. The real goal is to create things that you really want to, and to be able to live off it' (interview).

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.flimmerfilm.no/dokumentar.html> [accessed 15.12.16].

Thomas Lokøen (age forty-two) started working for the company in 2012 as a CEO, and he is also one of the owners of the company. He is part of the board, together with Christer Larsen, who works for Flimmer Film, and two other people with backgrounds in strategic planning and management. Lokøen is from Bergen and has a background in advertising and he had worked for seven years at NRK as a program engineer. As a CEO, Lokøen says this about the company's challenges: 'To adjust the ambitions to what is possible to get financed. That is challenging. You want to deliver, but it is not always financially possible' (interview).

### *Bergen and Western Norway as a film region*

Geographically speaking, Western Norway consists of the counties of Møre og Romsdal, Sogn og Fjordane, Hordaland and Rogaland. The city of Bergen is the centre of the film business there, and both Flimmer Film and Mer Film have Bergen offices. With the recent consolidation of the film funds Fuzz in Bergen and Filmkraft Rogaland in south-western Norway, a new fund, called Zefyr, now covers both Western and Southern Norway, as well as Telemark county. Zefyr was established in 2016. However, there are still two regional film centres in Western Norway, one in Bergen, Hordaland county, and one in Stavanger, Rogaland county. Bergen is also the location of the Western Norway Film Commission, which provides consultation and support to international filmmakers who want to use Norway as a location for feature film, television or commercial work.

While Bergen and Western Norway host the largest film milieu outside of Oslo, the managing director at Vestnorsk filmsenter [Western Norway Film Centre], Stine Tveten, describes the situation as fragile—lack of stability of work forces many film workers to Oslo: 'We try to build and develop the talents, but the challenge is to keep them in the region' (interview). According to Tor Fosse, leader of the Bergen International Film Festival (BIFF), Western Norway has the most active documentary milieu outside of Oslo (Skagen, 2014), partly because the film business has adapted to the funding possibilities. Tveten confirms this as well (interview).

In addition to BIFF, the documentary festival in Volda, Møre and Romsdal county, is also important to the local film business, and Volda and Bergen have animation, documentary, and film and television studies. Public broadcasters TV2 and NRK are also important to the local film business, because they buy productions from the local companies, including Flimmer Film, as mentioned above.

A 2009 report that maps the film business in the region confirms that Hordaland county and Bergen municipality have made viable commitments to film, and the region has access to regional private funding as well (Larsen, Holthe, & Ryssevick, 2014). Private investors have contributed substantially to Zefyr, for example. Most of the film

workers in this area are young, and most of the companies have only one employee. The report also indicates that the handful of bigger production companies are crucial, because they represent working opportunities and continuity for the local film workers. The film workers in Western Norway have the advantage of leadership from politicians who actively promote the regional film business. For example, politicians in Western Norway initiated a report whose goal was to analyse how they might impact national film policy and attract a greater share of public funding (Ryssevik, 2014). Bergen municipality has a film and art consultant with a background in the local film business.

### *Filmbin*

Filmbin is based in Lillehammer, in the central eastern part of Norway. Producer Trine Aadalen Lo, director, and her husband, Christian Lo, and editor/scriptwriter Arild Tryggestad established the company in 2004. They met at Danvik folk university college in 1997, where they studied film.<sup>15</sup> Trine Aadalen Lo and Christian Lo took bachelor's degrees in film and television studies in England, and Tryggestad worked as a freelance editorial assistant. The three first worked part time in their company in Oslo while pursuing studies and part-time work elsewhere. They decided to commit themselves fully to Filmbin in 2004 and moved to Lillehammer, partly because Tryggestad studied there and partly because they were offered a cheap office and a business establishment course in Lillehammer by Lillehammer og Gudbrandsdalen Kunnskapspark (LGKP). LGKP is a knowledge park that tries to stimulate and support the development of knowledge-based business in the Lillehammer and Gudbrandsdal region. None of the employees at Filmbin are originally from Lillehammer, and Filmbin was one of the first production companies in the Lillehammer area. In 2009, they hired Nicholas Sando as a producer, and the four now co-own the company and constitute the board.

Filmbin focuses on producing films for children and youth, and its first project, *Bestevenner* (Rafiki), came out in 2009. It received the Norwegian cinema managers' highest award, for best children's film in 2009, and it was screened at the Berlin Film Festival the following year. The film *De tøffeste gutta* (The tough guys) came out in 2013. It won the Audience Award at the Children's Film Festival in Kristiansand, Norway, and was screened at the Chicago International Children's Film Festival. In addition, the company has produced several short films. The company's third fiction film, *Los Bando Immortale*, will go into production in autumn 2016. Filmbin also makes practical and organisational arrangements for other companies that do productions in the Lillehammer area. Producer Nicholas Sando, for example, worked on the production of the television series *Lilyhammer*. Filmbin also presents film courses, and Tryggestad does editorial assignments for other companies.

<sup>15</sup> A folk university does not involve grades or exams. People go there for a year to concentrate on their interests.

## Interviewees

Trine Aadalen Lo (age forty) works as producer and has a bachelor in film and television production from the University of the Creative Arts in England. She is originally from Rugtvedt, Telemark county, which is in the southeastern part of Norway; she moved to Lillehammer in 2004. As to establishing the company in a small film region, she says, ‘Now we are more people here, and that is what we want. We all try to support each other and help each other. It benefits all, and I think you need to think like that when you are located in a small region’ (interview).

Christian Lo (age thirty-nine) is a director and has the same degree as his wife. Lo is from Vinstra, in Gudbrandsdalen, eighty kilometres north of Lillehammer. Lo also teaches film courses for schools, which he sees as a way of engaging with the core audience (interview).

Arild Tryggestad (age forty-one) is a scriptwriter and film editor. He studied film editing at the Norwegian Film School in Lillehammer. He works as a film editor for other companies as well, on behalf of Filmbin, and is from Leirsund, twenty-five kilometres north of Oslo. As a film editor, he has found most of his work in Oslo: ‘Ideally, the region should host one feature film project each year to be able to keep its film workers, not every second or third year’ (interview).

Nicholas Sando (age thirty-six) works as a producer and CEO for Filmbin. Sando first worked for Filmbin on a three-month film recruitment scholarship from NFI and served as a production assistant on its first film, *Bestevenner*. Filmbin hired him to be a producer after this project. Sando works as a location scout and makes practical arrangements for visiting producers. He is from Holmestrand, a small town seventy kilometres south of Oslo. According to Sando, Filmbin has a flat structure, and everyone is heard: ‘We are a small company and we pull together. Arild and Christian develop project ideas, and then Trine and I, as producers, discuss them in plenary and suggest how we can proceed’ (interview).

### *Lillehammer and the Inland as a film region*

The Inland region covers the counties of Oppland and Hedmark, and the two cities of Lillehammer and Hamar host most of the film workers. This is a young film region that came about primarily as the result of private initiatives after 2000—local politicians and investors wanted to promote the cultural industries because of their economic potential. There are few possibilities for private funding, unfortunately. The regional film centre Østnorsk filmsenter [Eastern Norway Film Centre] is located in Lillehammer. According to its former leader, Arngrim Ytterhus, the centre has seen an increase in the amount of applications for funding and has noted a corresponding increase in the

professionalism of the local film business as well (interview). The regional film fund, Filminvest, is located in both Lillehammer and Trondheim.

There are several film festivals in the region that represent opportunities for the local film business, both as a gathering place and as an arena for showing their work. Lillehammer is host to the Amandus Lillehammer International Student Film Festival, and Fjellfilmfestivalen takes place each year in the mountain region in Oppland. In Hedmark, Hamar hosts the Hamarama film festival, and Elverum hosts the festival Movies on War. The Norwegian Film School was established in Lillehammer in 1997, and though many of the students at the film school move to Oslo after their studies, some do remain, including Arild Tryggestad, who works for Filmbin.

### **Exploring the cases: empirical sources**

As discussed previously, case studies may include an extensive list of what Yin (2014) describes as ‘sources of evidence’, or what I call empirical sources. The following section focuses on the qualitative interview, which is the main empirical source in this case study. I also present additional sources, including policy documents and reports, as well as magazine and newspaper articles. Multiple sources enable deeper exploration of the companies in question and inform my interpretation of the interviews as well.

#### *Doing a qualitative interview*

Semi-structured interviews constitute the main empirical source for this thesis. Semi-structured interviews are usually based on a pre-established set of questions that are presented to all respondents, but the interviewer can vary the order of the questions and also ask follow-up questions, to clarify answers or delve more deeply into a topic (Brennen, 2013, p. 28).

The interview is widely used in media research and represents an effective means of gaining knowledge, but the process can be complicated by many factors, such as the interviewer’s pre-understandings, competence and interview skills, the attitude of the interviewee, and the interpretation that happens during the interview situation and afterward, during the analysing process (Jensen, 2002). Oakley (1981, p. 31) has an entertaining comparison: ‘Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets’. For my purposes, the qualitative interview was superior to observation and fieldwork, given that these companies are located far apart in three different regions, and that smaller productions often arise on short notice, which makes it difficult to make plans to observe them. I did not pursue participant observation at the companies’ offices either, because these spaces are rather small and, with the exception of Flimmer Film in Bergen, there are never more than four people around. My presence would therefore be

potentially disruptive, skewing whatever information I might get.

With a total project timeframe of three years, as well, I found it prudent to focus on qualitative interviews as my main methodological approach. It was not easy to plan a company visit because the interviewees were busy, often on travel and their working tasks changed quickly. Because I was not following any productions or doing observation, all my interviews with the people in the four companies were planned and, therefore, formal. I contacted the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and received the necessary approval to go further with the project, which would involve personal information. I then contacted the companies by mail or telephone. All of the interviewees received an email in which I described the project and asked for permission to do the interviews. The responses were all positive, and no one expressed any concerns. Some were a bit disappointed when they heard that it would take three years to finish the project. When I began in 2014, people working in the film business were waiting for a new, and long-promised, national film policy. Some of the interviewees thought my thesis might represent important information for the government and perhaps an opportunity to impact policy. I anticipated the fact that the interviewees might see my work as an opportunity to express their opinions to policymakers—everyone in the film business wants the government to prioritise their region, genre or format. It was therefore necessary for me to acknowledge the people behind the various arguments in the film-based political debate, especially in article 1, which addresses the implementation of regional film policy. Bruun (2016) argues that ‘exclusive informants’, meaning those with non-replaceable knowledge, have agendas that researchers must take into account when interpreting interviews. Statements must be related to their regional context. While this project sought insight into film production in the regions, I do not intend to be a spokesperson on behalf of regional film and television workers.

I interviewed all the people who worked at Original Film, Mer Film and Filmbin, and four of the people at Flimmer Film. I privileged the leaders and founders of the companies, because they had the most experience and the most strategic impact.

The interview guide is based on my four research questions, and especially the overall question. I had several questions within each of these four themes. The questions were mostly open ended, though some were more fact oriented, such as questions about the individual’s practical and educational background and position in the company.

Based on the experiences I had in the first interviews, I made small changes to my interview guide. I had too many questions, for one thing, and was occasionally asking the same questions using different words. Sometimes the questions were not clear or precise enough. For example, in my first interview, I asked about the organisational culture in the company. The interviewee answered, ‘That is a concept that I am not



familiar with—what does that really mean?’ I appreciated the opportunity to rephrase my question and realised that some interviewees might not admit unfamiliarity with a concept, and I should do my best to be clear. I did not follow the interview guide too strictly, and if something interesting came up, I tended to let the interviewee continue talking. I also tried to follow up on statements that were unclear. This is all part of an interpretive, hermeneutic process of remaining open to new information which in turn gives rise to new assumptions.

I did the interviews at the companies’ offices, with the exception of two people who were not present when I visited and engaged by telephone instead. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. I started at Filmbin, where I did two of the interviews with individuals and one as a group interview (director Christian Lo and editor/scriptwriter Arild Tryggestad participated together). In the group interview, the participants tended to simply confirm what the first person said rather than elaborating upon it. I found that the possibility of an interesting exchange in a group interview did not outweigh the advantages of individual interviews. My findings from Filmbin also derived from the fact that the company has a very flat organisational structure. Because the employees mostly decide things together, their answers to questions tend to be similar too. As producer Trine Aadalen Lo said in advance of my later interviews at the company, ‘They will probably say the same as I did. For the most part, we have the same meanings and opinions’.

Research on qualitative interviews often emphasises the asymmetrical power relation between the interviewer, who is responsible for confidentiality and direction, and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In media production studies, of course, this is not as obvious—the interviewee might well be a persuasive, professional communicator who is perfectly capable of flipping the script and looking out for him/herself (Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 2002). Bruun (2014, p. 35) notes that some interviewees are professionals with an agenda who might try to use the researcher for their own ends. Anonymity therefore weakens the force of the responses and subsequent analyses. It is important to be able to place statements according to the interviewee’s character and position, particularly given my interest in their exclusive knowledge about how these companies work and what affected their ability to pursue their goals (Bruun, 2016).

None of the interviewees had any problems with the lack of anonymity, but some of them wanted to read their statements before they were published. It says in my consent form that the name of my sources will appear in the texts. I emailed the consent form to them before I did the interviews, and I handed it out to them so that they could read and sign it before we started the interview. I also repeated my assurance that I would give them the opportunity to check for accuracy or misinterpretation and offer any other

comments that they might have.

One objection to naming sources is that it may affect the way they talk. If the interviewees are anonymous, they might speak more freely or truthfully. Owning one's statements might make the interviewee more susceptible to criticism. While film workers might have some strong opinions, they may not want to express them in public, on the record. The regional film milieus are all rather small, and too much bluntness or frankness, especially regarding one's peers, may not be prudent. In the regions, network building, reputation and trust are important.

All of the interviews were taped and transcribed. I transcribed four of the interviews myself, then asked a transcriber to do the other ten because I wanted to save time. In the analysing process, I first listened to the interviews and read the transcriptions with an open mind, looking for interesting findings and entertaining all themes, whether they were related to my interview guide or not. Then I wrote brief overviews of my main findings for each interviewee, as well as important quotes and themes. After that, I categorised the findings based on my research questions and made overviews for each company. I read the interviews again each time I began a new article. For example, when I wrote the first article about policy and how the companies related to it, I marked all the statements in the interviews that I found to be relevant to policy. I worked with each company separately, first reviewing what the interviewees in each company had to say about a given research question, then narrowing my analysis down to the most important themes. For each research question, I wrote down headlines, key statements and keywords by interview. I structured the articles by themes rather than focusing on each company separately, in order to avoid repeating myself.

Throughout this process, I concentrated on what was important in the interview material, but my interpretations are also based on knowledge that I had gained from other empirical sources. Obviously, theory also informed the analysis. For example, the strong regional attachment of the northernmost company, Original Film, is not so remarkable when positioned relative to other studies of Northern Norway as a region. When Filmbin argues for a strong commitment to the local film business, as well, theories about social capital inform my understanding of why this optimistic attitude and willingness to trust local film workers benefit the small film regions.

As part of my research, I interviewed six people working at the regional film centres and funds. This happened face to face, by telephone, or by mail, sometimes several times over the three-year period of this project. The interviews were fact oriented and informal. To be able to understand and contextualise the four companies, I needed to know about the local context as well. These interviews included Tor Vadseth, leader of Nordnorsk filmsenter in Tromsø, and Svein Andersen of FilmCamp in Målselv in Troms,

which is a regional resource centre. From Western Norway, I interviewed Lars Leegaard Marøy, who was the leader of the regional film fund Fuzz in Bergen and chair of the board at Filmreg, an organisation that promotes the regional film funds and centres in Norway. He is now the leader of Zefyr. I interviewed Stine Tveten, leader of Vestnorsk filmsenter in Bergen. From the Inland region, I interviewed former leader of Østnorsk filmsenter Arngrim Ytterhus and Maren Moseng from Film 3 (now Filminvest).

### *Documents and other sources*

In addition to the interviews, document analysis supplemented the articles and final contribution. I worked with policy documents, annual reports from the regional film funds and centres, annual reports from the Norwegian Film Institute, reports concerning the Norwegian and greater European film and television industry, the companies' websites, newspaper articles and articles from film magazines. The documents enable an important validation process because they represent data that, in contrast to the interviews, are not 'biased' by the researcher (Jensen, 2002, p. 243). A mix of methods also sheds light on a topic because it presents different viewpoints to the researcher.

Policy documents have given me information about regional film in its historical and political context. As I discussed in chapter 2, the regions have historically had a strong position in Norway, and this position continues to impact the government's commitment to regional film. These documents were especially important early in my research process, when I was interested in reviewing as much information as possible before I did the interviews. The connection between film policy and regional policy, and the normative approach that sometimes characterises policy documents, is critical to any understanding of the companies and the changing political structures that surround them. Reading political documents is not always straightforward, because some parts are quite descriptive, some lean on earlier research, and parts are normative. It is necessary to ask questions when reading documents: Who writes them? For whom? With what purpose? For example, annual reports provided by regional film agencies who want to promote the local film business will not tend to be critical towards it.

The company Ideas2evidence has completed several reports on the Norwegian film business for the Norwegian government, as well as reports about the film business in Bergen and Northern Norway (Larsen et al., 2009; Ryssevik & Dahle, 2015). I have used the findings in these reports throughout this thesis and in the articles. Several reports have been part of the research process, and I have addressed these throughout the thesis. These reports describe the film and television industry, including regional film, in the Nordic countries, in Scandinavia, and in the EU and Europe, including reports from the European Audiovisual Observatory, an information source on the audio-visual sector in Europe. According to the website, the observatory aims to promote 'a clearer

understanding of the ways in which the audiovisual industries in Europe function, both from an economic and legal point of view'.<sup>16</sup> The Think Tank on European Film and Film Policy has produced reports about European film policy, the film business and its challenges. The consultancy Olsberg SPI's report titled 'Building Sustainable Film Businesses: The Challenges for Industry and Government' presents certain success factors for building sustainable film businesses (Olsberg, 2012).

The abovementioned documents were important to the research process, in terms of contextualizing the findings in the interviews and trying to understand the situation of the regional film companies. Throughout the project period, I searched for relevant newspaper articles about the film business and the companies. Some of my interviewees were also vocal in public debates in the local or national press. I also searched the companies' websites to see how they presented themselves. I examined film productions to see what geographical affiliations the directors revealed, and where the productions actually took place. I used this information specifically in the third article, where I discuss place and local affiliation.

### **An exploratory, interpretive approach**

My starting point for examining the companies has been hermeneutical, using interpretive case studies. This means that I wanted to describe and provide an understanding of the situation surrounding the regional film and television companies. It is important in interpretive studies to be open when it comes to examining data, and to moderate one's preconceptions, understandings and theories as part of this process (Walsham, 1995, p. 76). Within an interpretive tradition, knowledge about the world is understood as constituted by human experience. Reality is socially constructed, that is, and the purpose of research is to understand rather than find the universal (Willis, 2007, p. 95). This position also means that the researcher is not distinct from the research process but instead part of shaping the research, according to his/her preunderstandings. This is in contrast to positivism, where reality is understood to exist outside or independent of human thought and experience.

In the late 1800s, the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey made a distinction between understanding (*verstehen*), which he linked to a humanistic and social science tradition, and explanation (*erklärung*), which was related to natural science (Willis, 2007, p. 100). Understanding was a distinct goal, in and of itself. Danish social scientist Bent Flyvbjerg believes that social science must liberate itself from natural science, because it is a different kind of science (Flyvbjerg, 2001)—it deals with context and therefore cannot meet scientific demands about being universal and predictable. My emic approach

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.obs.coe.int/en/about> [accessed 26.12.16].

to the understanding of film and television companies means that I am interested in what the people working in the companies see as important, whereas an etic approach would focus on cultural practices based on external standards (Willis, 2007, p. 100). That said, recent research has questioned the distinction between an internal, emic perspective and an external, etic perspective (Jensen, 2002, p. 237). While I focus on the companies as meaning-making institutions using an emic, humanistic approach, I also acknowledge the importance of external factors to the companies.

American anthropologist Clifford Geertz has influenced production studies researchers, who use interpretation to investigate production cultures within the culture industry (see, for example, Caldwell (2008), Kjus (2009)). Geertz (1973, p. 9) describes data in this way: 'What we call data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their copatriots are up to'. This means that what the interviewee says is a construction—an interpretation of his/her situation—and the researcher interprets the interviewee's interpretations. Geertz then describes the analysis of culture as 'not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning' (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). A central concept in this anthropological tradition is what Geertz (1973) calls thick description, which is at once dense, detailed and rich (Gentikow, 2005, p. 28). Thick description confronts a multitude of complex conceptual structures which are often interrelated and not explicit (Geertz, 1973). With Gentikow, I transfer this notion beyond ethnography and observation to '(a) informants' own verbal descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation, and (b) the researcher's contextualized description of this description' (Gentikow, 2005, p. 30).

When describing and interpreting these regional companies, there is no single, true explanation. According to Caldwell (2008, p. 5), it is naive to think that those who are researching the media industry will find the authentic 'behind-the-scenes' reality, because reality in the media industry is always constructed.

## **The role of the researcher**

In a reflexive process, the researcher relates both to him/herself, which is to say his/her background and pre-understandings, and to his/her role as a researcher: 'Interpretive researchers are attempting the difficult task of accessing other people's interpretations, filtering them through their own conceptual apparatus, and feeding a version of events back to others' (Walsham, 1995, p. 77). When working hermeneutically, the researcher moves back and forth between the theme of the research, the context, and the researcher's pre-understandings (Willis, 2007, p. 106). It can also happen that the researcher impacts respondents' perceptions and representations, which Giddens (1984) calls a 'double hermeneutic'. Some media studies researchers have worked in the media industry themselves and sometimes make that experience a part of the research pro-

cess. Regardless of whether the researcher possesses an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ perspective, however, he/she is never truly objective in the research process. The researcher’s knowledge; conscious and unconscious attitudes, and pre-understandings cannot be put aside.

My position is as an insider, to some extent. From 2004 to 2008, I worked as a freelance journalist and a producer and director of two television documentary films for the national broadcaster NRK. I have experienced some of the challenges in this business, including the applying-for-funding process, which entails the investment of a lot of time reading and interpreting guidelines without knowing if it will come to anything at all (Eira, 2015). I have also contacted people at the television channels, trying to get them interested in buying or co-producing the films. I have experienced the insecurity that characterises this business, but, at the same time, I know how satisfying this work can be and why it is possible to live with the uncertainty, the ups and downs and the financial instability.

This insider experience demands that I am always aware of my affiliation, and of the ways in which my pre-understandings can affect my position as a researcher. For example, because I know how hard it can be, I am predisposed to sympathize with the regional film workers and their business. Yet I have not worked full-time in film since 2008 and have gained some perspective. My experience informed my interview questions and follow-ups, as well as my review of the exchanges afterwards. As Caldwell points out, people in this business sometimes criticise academics for being naïve, or for writing ‘elitist psychobabble’ (Caldwell, 2008, p. 10). My experience has helped me be less naïve, and helped me avoid situations where the informant takes over the interview. My experience has also informed my research process.

## CHAPTER 6. Final discussion and conclusion

In this last chapter, I will use the overall research question as a starting point: *What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a regional film and television production company in Norway?* I will present empirical implications and bring together the discussions, findings and arguments from the five chapters of part I and the three articles of part II. I will respond to the following questions: Why is regional film important, and why should the government support it? What should its goal be—to contribute to regional development and economic growth, or to increase the quality of Norwegian film by representing originality and diversity? I will engage using a bottom-up perspective by addressing the autonomy of the companies and film workers themselves. In the last part of the chapter, I will address the study's theoretical implications and suggest topics for further research.

### The need for justification

One of the greatest challenges for regional film production companies and the government is how to develop strong, sustainable regional film milieus among a scattered populace such as Norway's. The Norwegian film business is small and depends on subsidies, as is the case in many European countries. Public funding of the national film business is today taken for granted, because film is considered an important cultural expression. In chapter 1, I showed that discussions of regional film often feature two inter-related arguments *against* public funding. The first argument is economically motivated and states that because the Norwegian film business is fragmented and economically fragile, the government should concentrate its support on a strong, centralised film milieu in Oslo. The second argument is culturally founded and questions whether regional filmmaking can possibly promote quality and professionalism. These two arguments touch upon tensions between centre/periphery and culture/business.

### Centre and periphery

As I show in article 1 and chapter 3, Norwegian film policy was centralised until 2007, because the Labour government wanted to promote nation building and a unified, national film business. Since 2007, the government has reversed course and promoted regional film as a counterweight to the dominance of the capital. Interestingly, the Conservative Party and Progress Party's most recent film policy of 2015 involves an element of 'regional centralisation'—that is, a commitment to fewer, stronger regions.

This new interest, which is a hybrid of centralisation and regionalisation, derives from an interpretation of clusters and size to secure a steady flow of productions and to improve the quality of the films. My interviews demonstrate that size is a topic of debate within the regions as well, and people who work in Bergen, the largest film region outside of Oslo, subscribe to the argument that public funding should favour the biggest film regions. According to Bondebjerg and Redvall, Scandinavia has a cultural diversity model which ‘tends to create weak production structures (a fragmented culture of small unstable companies)’ (Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2011, p. 19). Today’s policy, I find, has shifted towards a sustainability model which legitimises result-based funding to the regions, private funding and commodification over the earlier democratic focus on equal allocation of public funding across all the regions.

Though many film and television companies in Norway struggle economically, the findings in this thesis indicate that it *is* possible to survive as a regional company without a financial foundation. The companies depend on public funding but also use their human resources and competence effectively to take advantage of existing opportunities. They enjoy regionally inclined funding opportunities, local goodwill and support, access to local talent, stories and scenery, and the overall uniqueness that comes from the periphery as opposed to the centre. Social capital is also an important benefit of being in a region—the companies’ holistic approach reflects their commitment to staying local whenever they can, and in return the local film workers gain competence. Because the regional film business is small, the companies also enjoy greater visibility. The local press is positive and there is a sense of community and support among the local film workers. Proximity to regional film agencies is also a great advantage, including access to their courses, programs and people. According to my interviewees, it is easier to receive funding from regional agencies than from the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI) in Oslo.

## **Business and culture**

The second argument against public funding of regional film touches upon the quality and professionalism of regional film versus the product generated by the film business in Oslo.

Chapter 2 and the first article demonstrate that the Norwegian state has emphasised, and still promotes, the importance of a scattered population. The government supports regional film partly because it wants to improve working opportunities and development in the regions. In this sense, regional film is important as a means of achieving something else (Cruickshank et al., 2009; Gray, 2007). Regional development, and not aesthetic or quality value, is the most important rationale behind public funding of regional film. The creative industries concept is important to understanding the rationale behind current regional film policy because it promotes the business aspect of film.



Research shows that the economic aspect of culture is part of a regionalisation process that emphasises growth from below (meaning from the regions) (Pinheiro & Hauge, 2014). However, this rationale for the funding of regional film implies that regional film is a rural and regional political tool without any quality of its own, which in turn sustains the hegemony of the centre over the periphery in the Norwegian film business. Mangset (2002) describes this as a debate within the cultural field between professionals and amateurs along a centre-periphery axis. Article 3 indicates as well that a regional attachment is not necessarily beneficial, thanks to existing hegemonic discourses within the cultural field that view regional film workers as less professional than those in Oslo.

How do my interviewees respond to this context of policy structures and hegemonic discourses? The fourteen film workers definitely have their own goals and express a strong sense of autonomy. Despite an increasing emphasis on economy and sustainability in film policy and some scepticism regarding the aesthetic value of regional film, all four companies in this study continue to pursue artistic goals. They all want to make money and succeed in a competitive environment, but creative ambition determines economic strategy, not the other way around. Because these companies have made critically acclaimed films, they prove that regional film production can be professional, and that regional films are not necessarily inferior to films produced by a company in Oslo. Film policy must recognise that companies may not reduce their artistic ambitions, even when policy promotes commercialism.

### **Skewed funding between centre and periphery**

The government determines the amount of public funding and its allocation between the Norwegian Film Institute in Oslo and the regional film agencies. As all of my interviewees underlined, public funding is crucial, and locally inclined funding is welcomed by the regional companies. However, the regional film agencies cannot compete with the financial resources of the NFI in Oslo, because NFI receives 87 per cent of the funding (Prop. 1 S (2015-2016)).

According to workers at all of the companies, skewed funding between centre and periphery is a significant drawback of being regional. The regional companies can apply for funding at the NFI, just like any other company, but, as I pointed out in chapter 1, 80 per cent of the funding from NFI went to companies in the Oslo area in 2015. Because approximately 50 percent of the actual companies are located in Oslo (Rysevik et al., 2014), these companies clearly receive a considerable amount of the funding and therefore continue to represent the hub of Norwegian film production. There are two ways of interpreting the funding praxis of the NFI. The structural view explains the skewed allocation by pointing to structures that are out of the companies' control, such as their geographical distance from the funding institution. The agency view insists that

the companies with the best applications see the best results, regardless of where they are located. This view makes it legitimate to question the quality and professionalism of the regional companies.

### **Low production volume and brain drain**

Low production volume is a major challenge for the regional film and television companies to overcome. It leads to brain drain, which means the loss of talent. Companies must keep up the production volume, because the local film workers depend on them, but it is not easy. As producer Johnny Holmvåg at Flimmer Film says, the regional companies train and educate the young, local film workers, but, after a while, many of these talents move to Oslo because there is more work. The companies then need to start all over again. As I discuss in article 2, the knowledge resources that talented film workers possess are not easy to reproduce. Sometimes, then, regional companies have to import film workers from Oslo or abroad because the region cannot supply the requisite skills. Because film work is project based, film workers are used to moving around, including to and from the capital (Dahlström & Hermelin, 2007). In addition, the loss of talented people means that fewer projects are developed, which again contributes to low production volume.

However, the findings indicate that locating a company outside of Oslo is not necessarily a disadvantage if one already has a name in the film business and people in the NFI know who one is. Mer Film's Maria Ekerhovd is an award-winning producer who has never lived in Oslo. Several of her productions have received funding from NFI, which indicates that agency, not only structure, affects the funding praxis at NFI. According to her, the key is to be recognised—one needs to succeed with a project so people in the business acknowledge you.

### **The advantage of place**

All the interviewees emphasise that location is an advantage more than a disadvantage. While most of the research on the creative industries examines how they affect a region, article 3 shows how place affects the creative industries, or, in this case, regional film and television companies. Most of the interviewees promoted a regional identity, and place works as a creative point of departure. Most importantly, they *wanted* to stay local, which meant that they actively sought regional talents, searched for local stories and used their natural surroundings in the productions.

#### *The need to be local, but universal*

The problem with the regional development discourse and the cluster discourse that I addressed earlier in this chapter, and in chapter 4, is that neither emphasises the intrinsic

value of regional film—both focus instead on regional film as an instrument for achieving something else. We might wonder, then, whether film and television production in the regions is important in and of itself, as a contribution to diversity and quality films?

Public funding of regional film rests on the premise that regional film production represents something other than film produced in the centre. My interviewees argued that regional film is important because it contributes to diversity, and this cultural argument informs film policy as well.

The companies emphasise that they want to tell universal stories from a local perspective, addressing themes that could be relevant to an audience beyond the national border. Producer Eric Kama explains that Original Film uses the scenery from Northern Norway as a setting, but their stories should have a national or universal appeal. Flimmer Film wants their projects to get international distribution: ‘If you want to sell something to the BBC, you need to make an international series. You don’t come to them with a Norwegian series; they are not interested in that. It must have content that interests Englishmen’ (managing director Thomas Lokøen, interview).

The challenge is to get these universal programs and films financed. When applying for funding, companies must follow the criteria of the different funds and/or television channels. Flimmer Film producer Johnny Holmvåg points out, ‘We are trapped between the Norwegian television channels’ need for Norwegian content and the international market’s need for unique stories with universal themes’ (interview). According to Holmvåg, then, the location can be local, but not the content. Holmvåg describes a dilemma: the project needs to be place or culture specific in order to get public funding, but projects that are too culture specific in content are usually not interesting to an international audience. A documentary that is, in their words, ‘too Norwegian’ will not succeed internationally. Paradoxically, Norwegian film policy asks that Norwegian films should succeed internationally but also pass the culture test—that is, satisfy cultural criteria—when seeking funding at the NFI. As I show in chapter 4, this is a challenge for companies in other countries as well—the result of an increasingly international industry where formats, programs and films travel across borders. International distribution is a way of making more money for companies, and it enhances the companies’ reputations, which makes it easier to connect with co-producers abroad. The belief that regional film must be regional, local or place specific obviously limits regional film production to those works that can be categorised as such. This is exactly the point of Flimmer Film: it is located in a region, but it is an international television company, not a *regional* company.

However, Flimmer Film acknowledges that regional companies are important to the public broadcasters NRK and TV2 because they represent access to stories, environ-

ments and people other than the companies in Oslo. Since NRK and TV2 are obliged to represent the whole country, regional companies can satisfy niches instead. In addition, the Norwegian film audience prefer films with a regional attachment, and films produced in a specific region often attract a large audience in the same region (Kalkvik & Risvik, 2006). Films with local attachments and a connection to specific geographical places have a tendency to succeed in those areas (Banerjee, 2002; Waisbord, 2004).

This regional taste for film appears to conflict with the desire to develop these films' international potential. Serra Tinic argues that 'culturally specific programs are negotiated within an arena of competing interests, including the perceived need to gain access to global markets, the political and economic limitations of federal cultural policies and funding practices, and national network programming structures' (Tinic, 2005, p. x). Waisbord (2004) finds that globalism has resulted in a standardisation of content in the television industries. However, because the audience prefers local content, programs from other places must include something that everyone has in common. This is why Flimmer Film developed the documentary series *Death*"; everyone has a relation to death whether you live in Norway or India. The place just becomes a setting, it could be anywhere in the world, because the story is familiar in a global perspective. In this scenario, regional films become local expressions of global phenomena (Mangset, 2002). As the interviewees also recognize, people want to see stories from where they live, stories that concern them. Erasing place and culture-specific features from these kinds of stories might also contribute to erasing people's place identity or sense of place (Agnew, 2014; Escobar, 2001).

It is a problem when the companies no longer have the power to define the content of their stories or to decide what stories they want to produce. In the end, it is a matter of power: Who represent us, and who should decide what stories we tell about ourselves? This is not a 'regional' problem; it concerns the Norwegian film business, and the European film industry as a whole, especially at a time when American films and television programmes continue to dominate the market.

Diversity in film relates to gender and race but also to regional diversity, which means the varied representation of everyone in a society. The government subsidises the national film business because it is an important cultural expression, and because it represents the *Norwegian* society—in other words, because Norwegian films are different from other places' films. Regional film companies contribute to diversity thanks to their cultivation of local talent, which benefits the Norwegian film business. They *want* to tell stories inspired by their local surroundings, then export these stories internationally. Many of the actual productions also take place in the regions. Film is a visual medium that features important images of a country and people. Diversity as a rationale has an element of nation building as well, and the four

companies actively take part in and affect the visual representations of Norway.

## Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis has been to use the lens of production studies to explore the implications of being a regional film company in Norway, in a context where film policy sets important premises for the work. The findings in the articles and the discussion and empirical implications in the previous chapters offer insight into how the companies succeed and achieve their goals in an economically challenging business. My production studies approach has included perspectives on the creative industries, knowledge-based resources and place. Combined with the case study as a methodological approach, this research strategy allowed me to respond to the research questions posed for the study. This final section presents theoretical implications, limitations and possibilities for future research.

### *Theoretical contribution to production studies*

In chapter 4, I placed my study within the production studies tradition. This thesis contributes to the field because it offers a bottom-up perspective on the individuals and companies while also accounting for the historical, political and economic context. Few such studies exist, even though several researchers argue that it is important to capture both broader macro perspectives and more intimate meso and micro perspectives (M. J. Banks, 2015; Lotz, 2009). The advantages of doing what Lotz (2009) describes as an industry-level analysis include the ability to account for, and recognise, the dialectic relationship between the companies' autonomy and their dependence on the external environment—policy, economic structures, the local film business, and international demands for certain kinds of content, among other things.

In addition, production studies seldom address small companies, not to mention regional companies. As I have shown, regional film and television production is often included as part of the creative industries, and this thesis contributes to the discussions concerning the creative industries and clusters, an area that has received much scholarly interest in recent years (M. Banks & O'Connor, 2009). In the second and fourth chapters, and in article 1, I show that the emphasis on economic growth and regional development in the creative industries concept is important with regard to the rationale behind the support of regional film. Research often discusses the creative industries in relation to regions and clusters, and I see two contradictory discourses there. The regional development discourse emphasises that the creative industries can contribute to economic growth in small places, whereas the cluster discourse focusses on size and cities as important for the creative industries to thrive. In addition, both the creative industries and the cluster concepts are ambiguous and broadly defined. I therefore argue

that research on creative industries and clusters needs to address the specific national context and the specific type of creative work in question. For example, the cluster concept is mostly developed and discussed using big cities as a starting point, but Norway is sparsely populated (Porter, 2000). This thesis elaborates upon and problematizes the use of these concepts in relation to the film and television industry.

How these concepts are understood is important, because they continue to impact policy and research. The scholar must remain aware of how an economic emphasis might affect actual productions, because film and television productions have an identity and a value beyond the commercial, as autonomous, creative expressions.

This thesis also contributes to discussions regarding the concept of success in relation to small film production companies. Research often equates success with profit, but, in article 2, I conclude that this does not make sense in a Norwegian context. My framing of these companies as successful accounts for the specifics of the Norwegian film business, the fact that public funding is crucial, and the unique goals of these companies for their work. Creative ambitions or political and social goals are other ways to define success.

Research on diversity in film often addresses gender and race, but few studies include regional diversity, whereas this thesis centres on it. Research within human geography that addresses the creative industries, clusters and place is relevant to my discussions, and I apply notions of place to the discussion of regional film. By elaborating upon three categories from geographical research—sense of place, locale and location—I question the assumption that place is becoming less important and argue that the relationship between the local and the global is, in fact, dialectic. Article 3 shows that it is possible to have a local and global focus simultaneously, and that globalisation does not necessarily erase the local in film and television production. This thesis contributes to discussions of the diversity concept in relation to agency and structure by showing how these companies must navigate among their own artistic goals, the national quest for the ‘typical’ Norwegian (or what film policy defines as a focus on language, culture and identity) and the international film industry’s interest in universal stories.

#### *Limitations and topics for further research*

This case study is not a broad empirical study based on extensive data—instead, it is nationally specific and limited to three regions and four companies. The arguments in the thesis do not necessarily apply to all regional companies, and the discussions concerning regional, cultural and film policy relate to a specific national context. It is not an aim of this thesis to offer broad generalisations but instead to interpret details and reflect upon the complexity of the four cases and their context through thick description (Geertz, 1973). Still, by discussing regional film companies in Norway, I contribute

to existing research on the cultural and business aspects of film and discussions about the value of regional film, both of which may have significance beyond the Norwegian context. This thesis was accomplished in a certain period, 2014–2017, and some parts of it run the risk of seeming outdated, thanks to changes in the film business that might make some of the findings less relevant. Change, of course, characterises the media industries, and, as such, this thesis indicates directions for future studies.

An interesting area of study would be the topic of diversity in regional film, for example by examining films and television programs to see whether the label of ‘regional film’ even means anything. Film analysis of regional film could easily be the topic of a whole thesis. How does the quest for the universal affect companies and productions? Is it possible to analyse regional film and television productions as examples of ‘national’ cinema?

The locations for film production are changing, and different incentive arrangements encourage many companies to produce their work in countries that are cheaper than their own home country. Many researchers have pointed out that this may result in a race to the bottom as different countries outbid each other while trying to attract these companies, so an interesting topic would be the impact of this dislocation on the films. In Norway, many regional film workers hope that the new incentive arrangement will benefit regional film, because visiting production companies are usually more interested in shooting in the regions than in Oslo, because of the scenery. Whether these so-called runaway productions will actually boost the regional film milieus remains to be seen.

I have argued that the latest film policy represents an economic turn in its philosophy, and further research would reveal whether, and how, this has impacted the companies’ work. Will it leave less room for creative, artistically ambitious projects? The regional film funds’ guidelines and their funding practices are of great interest here as well.

Lastly, I would propose that the creative industries discourse should continue to be a topic for researchers because of the great influence it continues to have. As I have revealed in this thesis, there seems to be a missing link between the expectations, on the one side, and the results, on the other. Further research should try to look beyond broad statistics to offer a more grounded focus on those who actually work within these creative industries. At present, the celebratory approach that some researchers adopt does not necessarily reveal the nuances and complexity that characterises this kind of work.





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## **PART 2. THE ARTICLES**



## Article 1

Article 1: Supporting 'Film Cultural Peripheries'? The Dilemmas of Regional Film Policy in Norway

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# Article 1: Supporting ‘Film Cultural Peripheries’? The Dilemmas of Regional Film Policy in Norway

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## Abstract

Public funding is crucial for the small Norwegian film industry. Based on an analysis of policy documents and interviews with regional film workers, this article discusses the implementation of regional film policy in Norway, and the tensions it has caused between center and periphery with respect to the allocation of funding. The creative industries discourse and the cluster concept are important for understanding this implementation; despite the new regional film policies the capital Oslo remains the undisputed hub of film production, and low production volume is still a challenge for the regions. Size, the article explains, is not only central when discussing Oslo as compared to the regions, but has also become a contentious issue within the regions. A key concern for the government, the article suggests, is how to create strong film milieus all over the country, which may entail the risk of spreading funding too thinly across the regions, resulting in a fragmented industry.

## Introduction

Film has often been understood as a driving force for regional development. Research also shows that regional film production contributes to a diversity of filmatic representations of landscape, stories, and voices (Dahlström *et al.*, 2005, p. 24). But even though the number of regional film funds in Europe has increased from 2000 and onwards (Newman-Baudais, 2011, p. 14), few studies have been made on regional film production and policy, and on how cultural workers respond to institutional discourses and political and economic frameworks (Havens *et al.*, 2009; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005, p. 9). This article aims to address this gap, by discussing the role of regional film policy in Norway, in terms of tensions between center and periphery, the allocation of funding, and the business aspect of regional film. It also examines how regional film and television companies perceive this policy.<sup>1</sup>

At the outset, European film policy and public support of film were to address the economic weakness of domestic film production, the domination of films from Hollywood, while assuming that film is both a means to nation building and a key art form (Thompson & Bordwell, 2010). In this sense, most European countries regard film as a mediator of language, local and national culture. At the same time, the eco-

conomic aspect of film culture has grown more important; symptomatically, the creative industries policy that originated in the UK in the late 1990s was aimed at boosting regional economy and development. In the Nordic countries, the creative industry-type discourse was not just enmeshed with cultural policy lingo, but appeared in other areas, such as regional and innovation policy, as well (Power, 2009, p. 447).

The implementation of regional film policy in Norway is interesting because of the country's longstanding concern with regional development and district policies; despite the relative smallness of the Norwegian film sector, film policy mandates that film production should take place all over the country. Regional prosperity and a population spread out evenly across the country have been important goals for the government. The fact that film production in Norway is largely subsidised allows governments to influence the industry by setting policy goals, and by controlling the allocation of subsidies and the amount of public funding; while most European countries have reduced subsidies due to the financial crisis, subsidisation has increased in Norway, at least until the change in government in 2013. From 2005 through 2009, Norway boosted the second largest public film funding per capita in Europe (Newman-Baudais, 2011, p. 42), and in the same period public funding of regional film increased from 14 to 37 million kroner (Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, 2009). Even so, people in the film business and politicians have debated the pros and cons of prioritising regional film production and film institutions, given how small Norway's film industry is. Cinematographer John Christian Rosenlund (2014) said to the Norwegian film- and television magazine, *Rushprint*, that film policy should not be guided by the same principles as regional policy, around which there are already distinct disagreements between central and peripheral milieus. Also, despite the clear commitment to regional film, Oslo is still the undisputed hub of film production. A recent government report states that 'The committee recognizes that it takes time to develop sustainable and stable production environments outside of Oslo. In the coming years, this should be a prioritized task within film policy' (NOU 2013: 4).<sup>2</sup> Following a brief presentation of my approach and a survey of earlier research, the article examines regional Norwegian film policy with a view to current dilemmas regarding the role of regional film, and tensions between center and periphery. Finally, the article examines how current policies affect production companies and their employees; how they work within given frames, and the degree of autonomy and agency that the latter allow.

### Methodological approach

The article applies a macro perspective by analysing film- and culture policy documents with an emphasis on regions and film. These documents reveal how policy has changed, film policy goals, and the arguments behind them. I have also examined government reports concerning the film industry, guidelines for regional film instituti-

ons and newspaper articles to trace a broader picture of regional film production and current debates.

It also aims to supply a micro perspective. From June to August 2014, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 film workers in four regional film- and television production companies, chosen because of their different geographical locations, because they have survived more than three years, and because they have accomplished critically acclaimed films, and/or good commercial results. Since the regional production companies and regional film institutions to a large degree depend upon governmental funding and guidelines, the interviews give a bottom up perspective on film policy and its implementation. Together, the film policy documents, the reports, and the interviews give a broader understanding of institutional structures, and how the companies act within the policy framework.

Two of the companies are located in Bergen, Western Norway, the city with the greatest number of workers and production activities after Oslo: Flimmer Film, which produces documentaries, shorts and commercials, and Mer Film, which produces fiction films (and also has an office in Tromsø, Northern Norway). Bergen plays a central role in my discussion because of its position as the largest region outside of Oslo. A third company, Filmbin is located in Lillehammer, in the Inland region, and makes feature films for children and youth. The last company, Original Film, is based in Tromsø, Northern Norway, and produces documentaries, shorts and television series, but with the ambition eventually to produce feature film in the future. I also interviewed six employees at regional film institutions in the Northern, -Western, and the Inland region about regional film production and film policy.

## Regional film and policy in Europe

Since World War II, European countries have devised cultural policies and public funding in order to push back against the increasing dominance of Hollywood and to counteract the structural weaknesses of the European audiovisual industry (Herold, 2004, p. 5). According to a Danish report on the Scandinavian film industry, virtually all European states have established aid systems to the film and audiovisual industries, as well as policies that support the regions and cultural diversity (Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2011, p. 22). The legitimacy of such aid is rarely questioned; the debates tend rather to revolve around the suitability of different forms of aid, their efficacy on the internal markets, and the amount of funding.

Despite these policies, research clearly shows that film production – just like the creative industries in general - tends to cluster in cities and urban areas (Florida, 2006; Power, 2003; Scott, 2006; Turok, 2003). The concept of ‘cluster’, which Porter (2000,

p. 16) defines as ‘a geographically proximate group of interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities,’ has been influential for policy thinking with respect to the creative industries (Turok, 2003). Martin and Sunley (2003) have criticized the cluster concept for being vague, and for lacking industrial as well as geographical delimitations.

As Dahlström *et al.* (2005, p. 32) suggests, it is all too easy to get a deterministic idea of film production as a big city business, in view of the many existing analyses of clusters and statements about the need for critical mass. Bondebjerg and Redvall’s report revealed that the production frequency of feature films is low in Scandinavia: most companies produce less than one film a year (Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2011, p. 9). Even so, Henning Camre (2011), executive director of Scandinavian Think Tank, argues that film funding in the Scandinavian countries do enable film production in the absence of, as it were, an ‘industrial backbone’. A film sector with many small companies may, according to Bondebjerg and Redvall, contribute to diversity, but also to a weak and fragmented industry. Bondebjerg and Redvall (2011, p. 10) favor clustering and big enterprise as a necessity for creative and commercial success: ‘Diversity is a good thing, but a diversity of this kind challenges the emergence of strong creative clusters with the strength and continuity of productions to succeed transnationally’. While I concede that size may be important, I would also point out that existing research is ambiguous as to what actually makes clusters strong, and that it has not resolved the issue of whether film production in smaller regions can be sustainable or not.

Research on creative clustering and regional film often involve discussions about place promotion, tourism and the impact on employment (Dahlström & Hermelin, 2007; Hedling, 2010b, 2013; Power, 2003; Sjöholm, 2013; Skoglund & Jonsson, 2012; Turok, 2004). While cultural policy makers in the Nordic countries long shared a sceptical attitude towards engaging with market forces, local authorities and regions eventually ‘began to invest in cultural activities for economic reasons,’ which meant that ‘the centre of cultural policies became increasingly local and regional’ (Duelund, 2008, p. 13). From the mid-2000s and onwards, cultural policy goals have also emphasized the economic potential of the creative and cultural industries, in the wake of the British Labour governments’ introduction of the ‘creative industry’ policy in the UK in 1997 that came to influence policymaking outside the UK as well (Flew, 2011, p. 9; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005); policy-making in this field is, as Ross (2009) argues, a major British “export”. According to Jayne (2005, p. 540), the ‘creative industries’ concept has influenced policy making in Norway, Canada, China and Australia, just to mention a few of the countries.

In addition to bringing what is usually regarded as the positive effects of cultural work, the creative industries are in this way also trusted to boost the regions (Skog-



lund & Jonsson, 2012, p. 189), and research does confirm that film production in the regions may benefit local businesses such as hotels, catering and tourism, and result in place promotion (Hedling, 2010a; Stene *et al.*, 2013). Critics argue, however, that such expectations are unrealistic because the economic gain is likely to be limited, and that policies ignore problematic aspects such as working conditions and poor income (Stam *et al.*, 2008; Turok, 2003, 2004). Such discussions about creative industries often display an inherently neo-liberal approach, where the economic and commercial aspects of cultural products are important. Jack Newsinger describes this audio-visual policy in the UK as largely determined by commercial interests, which in turn has made regional cultural policy near-undistinguishable from economic policy (2010, p. 106). But the Labour government has also been criticised for having unrealistic expectations on the film industry as a provider of job opportunities, failing to notice how the film industry forms of employment are often insecure and short-term (Blair *et al.*, 2001).

### The implementation of regional film policy in Norway

Historically, the regions have had a strong position in Norway. Regional differences have influenced Norwegian politics, and the formation of a national cultural policy (Bakke, 2001, p. 12). For instance, scattered population is a policy goal:

Our goal is to utilise human and natural resources throughout the country, in order to create the greatest possible national prosperity, ensure equal living conditions and offer everyone the freedom to settle wherever they choose (Ministry on Local Government and Regional Development (2013, p. 2)).

Karlsen & Dale (2014) describe how regional policy has changed. Until the 1970s, the government implemented an exogenous strategy, where the state facilitated growth from core to periphery. From the 1970s and onwards, this was replaced by an endogenous policy, focusing on decentralization in the decision-making process and a growth from below (Bakke, 2001, p. 19, Karlsen & Dale, 2014, p. 72). This perspective has influenced policy making in the field of regional development and the cultural industries. Film policy has, however, been strongly centralised. Building and sustaining national film production was the most important (Bjerkeland, 2015, p. 129). The regionalisation of the film sector must be seen in this context.

The number of regional film institutions increased after the year 2000, largely as a result of local initiatives. In 2011, the company Ideas2evidence evaluated the regional film funds on behalf of the Ministry of Culture. According to the report (2011), the local initiative takers were motivated by business interests to a greater degree than by cultural policy. In 2005 and 2006, six new regional film institutions were established

in Norway. The government also subsidised regional film with 7,5 million kroner in 2005, arguing that a stronger regional film industry would strengthen the national film industry as a whole ((Prop. no. 1 (2004-2005), p. 113)). But the national budget proposition for 2005 also made the significant caveat that 'Norway is a small country with a limited film industry and home market. There will be an upper limit regarding how many funds should be established without spreading the film industry and competence too much. This is especially so when it comes to fiction film' (Prop. no. 1 (2004-2005), p. 113)). Ryssevik and Vaage describe the impact of the new regional institutions in this way:

The new regional film institutions, that after a while wanted to have its share of the public film funding, created not just a tension between center and periphery on the film political arena. They also introduced film as a business-political area of interest, which was different from the cultural-political motivations that until then had dominated Norwegian film policy. These two dimensions – center versus periphery and culture versus business – is important to have in mind to be able to understand discussions about, and the changes of, Norwegian film policy the last ten years (Ryssevik & Vaage, 2011, p. 16).

These discussions involve questions about the allocation of money between the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI) in Oslo and regional film institutions, and what role the regional institutions should have. Today, regional film institutions are bound by government guidelines in their daily operation, and even though film production in the regions is important for the government, it continues to emphasize the necessity of clusters to improve the quality of Norwegian film. Since public funding is crucial for the Norwegian industry, these questions are subject to debate. The tension between culture and business raises the question of whether regional filmmaking is important just as a generator of business and money to Norwegian film, or if film produced regionally, by regional film companies, can have the same artistic and quality potential as films produced by a company in the capital. This also relates to a long and intense debate about whether cultural products whose origins lie in business-oriented systems of supply can have any genuine merit as expressions of artistic accomplishment (Scott, 2004, p. 3).

The business aspect of culture has become increasingly important, as is evident in the policy document 'Kultur og næring' (*Culture and Business*) (White Paper no. 22 (2004-2005) and a number of reports on 'cultural businesses' (Haraldsen *et al.*, 2004; Kobro, 2009). The White Paper 'Kultur og næring' (*Culture and Business*) claims that culture has a relative huge impact on the Norwegian economy, that the cultural industries are innovative and have great potential for development and growth, and that the cultural industries are important for local- and regional development (White Paper. no. 22 (2004-2005)). These arguments were themselves related to a larger trend

to focus on creative cities, clusters and creative industries (Florida, 2005, 2012). With reference to the development in other countries, the White Paper describes the potential for synergy when culture and business interact, and argues that culturally based businesses are important for local and regional development.

A search on Atekst, a database containing articles from the majority of Norwegian newspapers, suggests the growing attention received by the term 'kulturnæring' (culture business): while there were just 16 hits on the term in 2004, there were 277 hits in 2014. At the same time, this focus on the economic potential of culture happened all over Europe (Aubry *et al.*, 2015; García, 2004). For instance, the EU policy goals from the mid-2000s and onwards emphasize the economic potential of the creative and cultural industries (Erickson & Dewey, 2011, p. 504).

The Ministry of Culture expressed a positive attitude towards regional film; according to the 'Culture and Business' White Paper, regional films' most important goal is to increase the total amount of film production, since this will contribute to 'continuity, professionalization, strengthening of the quality and diversity' (White Paper no. 22 (2004-2005), p. 78). Accordingly, regional film ought to increase recruitment in the regional film business, which in turn can have a positive impact on the local service business, tourism, catering and hotels. The Ministry also underlined that the regions themselves, not just the Ministry, should invest both public and private money in regional film activities, and by this increase the total amount of money available to the Norwegian film industry as a whole.

Even so, some film workers were afraid that too many film regions might cause funding to be spread too thinly across creative environments (Rusten, 2005, p. 7). The former director of the Norwegian Film Fund, Elin Erichsen, said to the public service broadcaster NRK, that the regions should produce documentaries and shorts, because the production of fiction film in the regions might result in weaker film milieus, and might therefore affect Oslo in a negative way (Fredriksen & Moe, 2007). Such scepticism is determined by cluster thinking, where the size of clusters is a key for the industry and companies to succeed, and where small, scattered film milieus are regarded as economically unviable.

In 2005, a report evaluating film subsidies on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs recognized the importance of regional film from the point of view of cultural politics, but also found business potential to be a critical factor (Rambøll, 2005). It further described the regions as 'film cultural peripheries', in contrast to the center, Oslo, the 'natural' address of filmmaking, and was thus generally not very positive to fiction film production in the regions (Rambøll, 2005, pp. 78-79). According to the report, regional film funds would not contribute to increasing the competence

or the artistic value of a film project. They would just contribute to develop the area (Rambøll, 2005, p.82). In other words, production and artistic development should take place in Oslo, while the regions should contribute to regional development. The government appointed a committee to work out a proposal for a new organization of the framework and funding in the area of film policy (Einarsson, 2006), whose conclusions were to exert a substantial influence on the new film policy; the committee was positive regarding regional film but - like the Rambøll-report - also underlined the necessity for the government to formulate a clear strategy for how best to support regional film.

In 2007, the Labour Party government announced their new film policy, aimed at strengthening Norwegian film and increasing its market share, in the report 'Veivise-ren. For det norske filmløftet' (*Pathfinder. For the Norwegian Film Effort*), named after a Norwegian Oscar candidate (White Paper no. 22 (2006-2007)). The report marked a new commitment to Norwegian film, acknowledging that 'Film is the most important cultural expression of our time,' the primary goal being to achieve 'a diversity of film- and television productions based on Norwegian language, culture and society, recognized by high quality, artistic boldness and innovation, that challenges and reaches out to a broad audience in Norway and internationally' (White Paper no. 22 (2006-2007), p. 7). The report also included a list of tangible goals: the export of Norwegian film and television drama should be doubled by 2010; 25 fiction films should be produced each year; Norwegian films should attain 25% of the market share in Norway, and win international film prizes.

Regional film was defined as part of this new ambitious film policy, and the government increased the regional film budget with 5 million kroner. However, the film report lacked concrete goals regarding regional film. On page 45 it says that one of the goals are: 'diversity in expressions, production cost and target group, based on strong film environments in all parts of the country'. While this does hint to regional aspects, it is not specific.

In 2013, it was a change of government, and the Conservative Party and the Progress Party took over. In May 2015, they introduced a new film policy, 'En fremtidsrettet filmpolitikk' ('A provident film policy') (White Paper no. 30 (2014-2015)). This report has a much stronger focus on regional film than the former. It states that the distribution of power and regionalisation of film policy will increase competition, diversity, and the quality in Norwegian film (White Paper no.30 (2014-2015, p.65)). However, except for transferring the funding of regional film efforts for children and youth from the NFI to the regional film institutions, it is not yet clear how this will be implemented. The organization of the film funds will change and the government wants a consolidation. They will subsidize two or three regional film funds, instead of

six. The implementation will take place in 2016. The latest film policy confirm how film policy has changed from being centralised, with a focus on cultural political arguments such as quality and nation building, to a more regionalised film policy, which emphasizes business- and district political arguments.

The regional film institutions are central for the functioning of regional film policy. Next, I attempt to outline the differences between those institutions, followed by a discussion of the largely unsettled situation with respect to their funding.

### The regional film centres: Developers of regional film culture

Today, there are seven regional film centers. Every region now has a regional film institution, except Oslo. The Norwegian government supports the centers on the conditions that they work to develop a regional film culture, which means grooming local talent and establishing film businesses, and increasing local interest in film culture. Local/regional political and economic support and the growth of a film milieu and competence in the region are preconditions for receiving subsidization (White Paper no. 22. (2006-2007), p. 94). The owners – the counties and municipalities – finance the operative activity. The government supports non-commercial activities such as talent- and competence development, films for children and youth, documentaries and shorts, through manuscript development courses, workshops, travel support, and social gatherings for local film workers. Guidelines vary, but usually the project and film company that apply for funding need to have a connection to the region. Regional centers are not allowed to use public funding to support fiction film and television drama, with the exception of the Western Norwegian film center, the only center in Norway where regional money is available for television series and fiction film.

The first regional film institution, The Northern Norwegian Film Center, was operative in Honningsvåg in 1981. The owners were Nordkapp municipality and the three northernmost counties Finnmark, Troms, and Nordland. The funding came from the government (75%), and the owners. It took 13 years before the second institution, The Western Norwegian Film Center, was established in Bergen. Film workers in Bergen had tried to establish a center in the 1970s, but did not succeed in getting the municipality and county interested. In 1994, Bergen municipality and Hordaland County agreed to being the owners, and to provide the necessary funding on top of the subsidization from the state.

Since 2014, the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI) allocates, controls, and follows up the subsidization of regional film institutions on behalf of the Ministry. The subsidization of regional film centers is based on a 60/40-distribution formula established by the Ministry (Hunnes, 2014). The first parameter, 60 % of the funding, is based on

the regions' population. Northern Norwegian Film Center, which serves a less populated region than the others, receives a greater share than the film centers that serve the more thickly populated regions. The second parameter of the distribution formula constitutes 40%, and is based on the size of the industry. It grants the regions and regional centers with the greatest strength, size and activity, such as Western Norwegian Film Center, more funding, than those with fewer results. In total, the distribution formula shows that the government have tried to strengthen small film regions more than regions that already display a higher level of business activity and size; this can be understood as congenial with the broader context of demographic policy. The allocation of funding to the regions is intensely debated, and the government has announced a change. A new distribution formula will be implemented in 2017.

### The regional film funds: Culture, business, or both?

In contrast to the centers, the regional funds invest in, and/or subsidise development and production of fiction film and television series, and differ from the centers in their clearly stated intention of making money. The development money is 'soft' money, which means that the companies can get funding to develop a project, and the fund does not expect to get this money back. However, the praxis differs considerably when it comes to production funding. In general, public funding is 'soft' money, which means that the fund doesn't expect to get the money back from the companies, but the funding coming from the region (from counties, municipalities, investors) is often 'hard' money and the company often has to pay interest, or the fund expects its share from the film's surplus. As a result, 'hard money' is expensive money to access for companies, while 'soft money' is not.

The first regional film fund was established in 2001, in Lillehammer, where the film industry was nearly non-existent. Local entrepreneurs and politicians initiated Film 3, because they saw the potential in film as an industry and source of employment (Ryssevik & Vaage, 2011, p. 29). Film 3 has received public funding since 2003, and is owned by three municipalities and the two counties Oppland and Hedmark. Film 3 has always had a strong business political focus (Film 3, 2013, p. 4). In the period 2005-2013, five new film funds were established and today there are six of them.

Funding from the government started as a pilot arrangement in 2007 as part of the new film policy. The government stipulates the amount of funding to the film funds and centers on a yearly basis, through the national budget. As is the case with the film centers, regional funding finances the operating activity of the film funds. The motives behind the government's subsidisation of regional funds were strictly economical. 'From a national perspective, the regional film funds contribute to new and fresh capital to Norwegian film production' (White Paper no. 22 (2006-2007), p. 94). The

region has to match every publically funded krone with at least the same amount of money. From the government's point of view, the film funds should attempt to attract private investors. Fuzz in Bergen is the only film fund that has succeeded in this, and it is the biggest of the regional funds. In 2015, Fuzz had 30, 575 million kroner at its disposal, approximately 80% of which is so-called 'hard money', from private investors, who expect profit from their investments.<sup>3</sup> It is important for Fuzz that a project has market potential. Just 20% of the money at disposal is publically funded 'soft money' from the Ministry of Culture (2015).

In addition, the film funds are meant to attract film productions to the regions, and contribute to sustainable regional film environments (White Paper no. 30 (2014-2015, p.73)). The political documents, however, reveal nothing about any artistic ambitions on behalf of regional film.

Like the centers, the film funds also have guidelines that encourage regional attachment. Film 3 states that a project needs to have a regional connection, that key personnel must be located in the region, and that production must take place there (Film 3, 2014). For Fuzz, it is important that the producer is located in the region, and/or that the project has a regional attachment.<sup>4</sup> Companies from Oslo or other regions might also apply for regional funding when, for instance, the production takes place in the region, or when projects have a strong regional attachment.

The film funds differ on how they prioritize artistic ambitions in relation to more commercially oriented films. For instance, Film 3 in Lillehammer invests in productions that are artistic and/or commercially interesting (Film 3, 2014), while Filmfond Nord in Bodø, Northern Norway, primarily invests in productions with a high market potential (Filmfond Nord, 2015). The regional film funds only offer top financing, which means that the companies need to seek most of their financing elsewhere. Like any company in Norway, they can apply for funding from the Norwegian Film Institute; in 2015, the NFI received 441,4 million kroner in funding from the Ministry of Culture. The regional film centers received 47,6 million, and the regional film funds received 11,2 million kroner (Ministry of Culture, 2015). This means that the NFI has almost 600 % more money at its disposal as compared to the regional film institutions.

### The ambiguous and unsettled situation of the regional funds

The intention behind the regional film funds was to support and invest in fiction film. This was, as policy documents show, a tall order, as fiction film is the most central and prestigious area within Norwegian film policy. Before 2007, when the Ministry removed this clause, the first regional funds, Film3 and Fuzz, were only allowed to support documentaries and short films (White Paper no. 22 (2006-2007)), a policy

that was ill-suited to their ambition to invest in commercial formats.

The government, however, introduced a new limitation: the regional film funds could not use public funding or the *matching* regional money to support fiction films that received money from the national film fund. The proposal was heavily debated (Innst.S. nr. 277 (2006-2007)). The film policy from 2007 also resulted in a process where all state film institutions merged into the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI) in Oslo. The minority in the committee on family and cultural affairs argued that the new film institute represented a concentration of power. The regional funds should have the freedom to invest as they liked, they argued, as a counterweight to this centralization process. The minister disagreed, arguing that spreading the funding of fiction films to even more institutions would only result in more bureaucracy, and that public funding of fiction film should come from one source only, the NFI.

The debate finally resulted in a compromise which allowed the film funds full control of the regional money, while they could not use public funding to support projects that had already received funding from the NFI (Ryssevik & Vaage, 2011, p. 27). But since the regional film funds only offer top financing, this was problematic because most companies do need financing from the NFI to produce fiction film. Film workers in the regions protested, and the culture editor of the regional newspaper *Bergens Tidende* (Landro, 2007), said the regions were the report's losers; if the film funds were only allowed to finance low budget films without subsidization from the NFI, this would anything but strengthen the local film industry. Eventually, in the national budget of 2013-2014, the government removed this limitation, and the regional film funds can now spend both publically funded money and regional money as they see fit.

In the evaluation of the regional funds, Ryssevik and Vaage (2011) concluded that the regional funds had indeed succeeded in bringing more money to the Norwegian film industry, but it also revealed differences between the film funds. The funds did strengthen the film business in the regions to a certain degree, but Oslo's function and status as the film industry's main hub was unchanged. The report recommended fewer funds because this could result in stronger regional film milieus.

Numbers from the national budgets show that while the regional film centers experienced an increase in the amount of public funding in the period 2008- 2013, the national funding of regional film funds did not change at all – and since those figures are not adjusted to price- and salary growth, the funding actually declined. This makes the regional film funds an exception to many other cultural institutions which have experienced an economic boost after 2004, when the government introduced the ambitious goal that one per cent of the national budget was to be invested in culture.



## How regional film workers perceive regional film policy

In this section, I turn to those who work in the film industry on a daily basis. Based on interviews with people working in four regional companies I ask: how do they experience current film policy, and how do current policies affect the companies and their capacity to pursue their goals?

It should be noted that not all of the interviewees displayed a deep engagement or great knowledge about film policy as such. The owners and the producers had the strongest opinions; they paid close attention to recent changes and development in policy-making, media debates, reports and other information that is relevant to the company. This is not surprising, since they are responsible for the company and project financing, and especially since public funding is important to all of the companies.

## Hard and soft money

To attract private investors is a film policy goal, but a challenge for the regional funds. Fuzz in Bergen, on the other hand, has succeeded in attracting investors, and more money to Norwegian film. But has this benefitted the region? According to producer Maria Ekerhovd in Mer Film, it has not necessarily boosted the local industry. 'Fuzz is an investment fund, which expects high interests. It is expensive money to get' (interview, 2014). Mer Film produces fiction films with artistic ambitions that normally have limited market potential. Their most important source of financing is NFI, which gives soft money and does not expect interests, in contrast to Fuzz. The leader of Fuzz, Lars Leegaard Marøy, describes this as a dilemma: 'Investments that are good for the local film industry are not necessarily profitable for our fund. Therefore, the industry depends on public money.'<sup>5</sup> He argues that the government needs to increase the amount of funding, as this would give the regional film funds better possibilities of investing in artistic and experimental projects that are important for the development of the local industry.

Fuzz has succeeded in bringing more money to Norwegian film, but the money is not at free disposal. Because they rely on private investors who want their money back with interest, they mostly invest in films with commercial potential. In this sense, Fuzz contributes to the business aspect of film, but not necessarily in developing artistic ambitious films because they seldom invest in these projects. By emphasizing the importance of more private money, the government also affects what kind of films the regional companies can or will produce. Less 'soft' money from the government and more 'hard' money from investors might result in more films with economic potential, and fewer artistic films, because these films usually have less market potential.

Many of the film workers are also concerned about what they argue is a skewed dis-

tribution of funding on behalf of the NFI, and that this affects fiction film production in the regions negatively. ‘Everybody can apply for funding at NFI, but most of the money goes to companies in Oslo. If they want film production to take place in the regions, by regional film companies, they need to do something about it’ (Ekerhovd, interview, 2014). In 2014, 85 % of the funding from NFI went to the capital region, Oslo and Akershus (Norwegian Film Institute, 2014, p. 11). One of the reasons for this skewed allocation might be distance; closeness to those working in the funding institutions seems important. Unlike the employees at the regional centers and funds, who closely follow the local film industry and know the local film workers, the talents and the potential – and thus have an extra will and incentive to support local film workers – the NFI cannot maintain such close relations to talents spread out across the country. According to Ekerhovd, being located in a region can be advantageous only if you already have your ‘foot in the door’ at the NFI; otherwise it is a challenge.

### Oslo versus the regions: the importance of fiction film and tv-drama

The greatest challenge for regional film is continuity, and to maintain a viable production volume. In the period 2006-2009, Bergen experienced a high level of production. Six feature films about the private detective *Varg Veum* were produced in the region, followed by two more film productions, *Vegas*, and *Skjult*. After this, film production in Bergen went through a downturn, and many film workers moved to Oslo to find employment. The leader of the Western Norwegian Film Center, Stine Tveten, underlines the importance of documentaries and short films in the region, but she also thinks that today’s guidelines, where the centers are not allowed to use public funded money to support fiction films or television series, are limiting (interview, 2014). Bergen is a good example of what happens in a region when the number of film productions declines.

Bergen is the largest film region, with the greatest activity and number of film workers, outside Oslo. It is also a region that according to the municipality’s own film report (2011) has clear ambitions of developing into a ‘film city’, and become as big as Oslo in proportion to the population. So far, they have not succeeded. The Bergen film workers complain of a lack of continuity and production volume, which eventually forces film workers to move to Oslo, where they can find work, and which means that the film industry in Bergen constantly needs to redevelop its infrastructure; there are simply not enough skilled people available all the time – producer Johnny Holmvåg at Flimmer Film says that the company is constantly looking for talented people (interview, 2014).

Lars Løge, also producer at Flimmer Film, a board member of the Norwegian Film and TV Producers’ Association, denounces what he calls arrogance in Oslo, both in the

industry, but also among politicians. Løge describes an attitude where the politicians and film workers in Oslo think it is acceptable to 'practice making short films and documentaries in the regions, and let those in Oslo do the bigger productions, such as television drama and fiction films. It is insulting' (interview, 2014). Documentaries and short films have traditionally held a strong position in the Norwegian regional film landscape, but despite the introduction of regional film funds Oslo clearly remains the center of fiction film production. Producer at Flimmer Film, Johnny Holmvåg, describes the importance of regarding regional film production not just as a cultural activity, but also business: 'If you just produce single documentaries and short films in a region, you will never be able to get the volume needed to create vital production environments.' (interview, 2014).

Such statements are closely related to debates over who should have the power to decide what regional film production can and should be, in which regional film workers underline the importance of television drama and fiction film as an engine for development and continuity in their region because it usually involves more people, longer working periods, and higher budgets than shorts- and documentaries. Earlier, this has been obstructed by government's policies designed to strengthen the NFI and fiction film in Oslo. Now the new film policy goes in a different direction, and emphasizes regionalisation. However, several film workers question whether the regions contribute to increased professionalization, and to the success of Norwegian film on the international market. This scepticism is not limited to the film industry. According to Mangset (2002, p.80), the cultural field is centralised, and many artist and cultural experts are sceptical towards a cultural political decentralization. One of the arguments is that film should not be used as a tool for regional development. Inherent in this argument, is an understanding of Oslo as the center of professionalism and quality, and the regions as contributors of diversity and regional development. As production companies that both have a strong regional attachment and make critically acclaimed films, the companies challenge the understanding of the regions as mere 'film cultural peripheries' (Rambøll, 2005) or just contributors to regional development. This discussion concerning center and periphery exemplifies how film policy in Norway is comprised of two complementary strands: the development of strong regional production clusters and the positioning of Norway on the international film arena.

However, the companies have to justify themselves in terms of how they contribute to economic growth in the region, and that they belong to a 'real industry'. 'We need to convince the politicians about the business potential, that it is worth putting money into the film industry. We contribute, as all other businesses, with income and work opportunities in the region' (Filmbin-producer Trine Aadalen Lo, interview, 2014). The cultural aspect of their work, of film as art and something valuable in itself, does not seem to be a selling point for politicians or private investors.

## Equal allocation or focus on the most vibrant regions?

The producers Lars Løge and Johnny Holmvåg in Flimmer Film, and Lars Marøy, leader of Fuzz, all in Bergen, argue that the strength of the film industry in each region is the best criterion for allocating public funding (interviews, 2014). Their argument rests on an appreciation of the importance of clusters and industry size. Norway is a long country geographically speaking, and sparsely populated; is it possible to create vibrant and economically stable film industries all over the country?

The leader of the Norwegian Film Workers' Association, Sverre Pedersen, says to the newspaper *Klassekampen* that regional funding is scarce, and that spreading this across all the institutions is 'like a bad joke' (Ørbo, 2013). Similarly, Ryssevik and Vaage (2011) conclude that regions with greatest activity, such as Bergen, should be prioritized because it is unlikely that film production can thrive in each region. Such debates over allocation point to a center - periphery dilemma for the regions themselves: should the government prioritize the strongest clusters and regions, or continue the traditional social democratic policy of equal allocation for all?

Earlier, the Labour government did not prioritize between the different regions. Equal allocation was more important than a selective allocation based on industry size and production results. The new policy of 2015 represents a political shift; the government, formed by the Conservative Party and the Progress Party, seems to move away from the earlier social democratic thinking. The business aspect of film, sustainability and cluster thinking, are the new guiding principles of today's film policy.

## Conclusion. Regional film policy – a hybrid phenomenon.

Historically, the regions have strong roots in Norway, and it is a policy goal that people should be able to live and work all over the country. In the 1970s, the government implemented an endogenous policy that focused on development from below. Despite this, film policy was centralised until 2007, when the government introduced a new and ambitious film policy. However, the government did not initiate the establishment of regional film institutions; they started as local initiatives, where local investors and politicians saw film as a possible contributor to increased employment, place promotion and tourism. The regionalisation of the film sector was part of a European trend where funding of culture was based on economic arguments and the prospect of regional development.

A central argument for the public funding of regional film is that film production should take place all over the country. Because the industry is so small and economically fragile, public funding is crucial for most film workers. The government influences the industry through policy goals, and the implementation of regional film policy

resulted in tensions between center and periphery about the allocation of funding. The government has been criticized for using film as a district policy tool, and film workers in Oslo argue that regionalisation will not increase the quality of Norwegian film, or contribute to success on the international arena. These discussions show a hegemonic discourse where Oslo contributes to quality and professionalization, and the regions represent diversity and representation. However, the regional production companies, which have succeeded in making critically acclaimed films, challenge the understanding of the regions as just 'film cultural peripheries' (Rambøll, 2005). Today, the regional film centers and film funds receive a small amount of money compared to the NFI, and the funding from NFI mostly goes to companies in the Oslo region. None of the regions stands out as a challenger to Oslo, which still is the main hub of film production.

A second argument, belonging to cultural policy, is that film policy should foment diversity in expressions. There is a conflict where the hard-nosed necessity for sustainability and the ideal cluster thinking comes up against the ideal of diversity and equal distribution. Notably, the issue of size is not only central when discussing Oslo versus the regions, but, paradoxically, also *between* the regions; in both Oslo and Bergen film workers regard strong clusters as important for the creative industries to thrive. As the largest film region outside of Oslo, the film industry in Bergen argues that the government should allocate public funding to the regions in proportion to the size and activity of their industries.

The third argument is the business-oriented one, as the government expects economic dividends to come from their support of regional film; regional film funds are to attract investors, and raise more money for the film industry. In sum, the fact that regional film policy is such a hybrid phenomenon, involving elements of regional, cultural, and business policy, will inevitably affect regional film workers, who need to pursue artistic goals while justifying their existence as a viable industry, and live up to economical expectations from politicians and regional investors. As a result, their work can to some extent be experienced as contradictory.

The new film policy introduced in 2015 represents a shift away from what Bondebjerg and Redvall (2011) calls 'the cultural diversity model', towards a more business-oriented model, influenced by cluster thinking. The policy shows an increased focus on endogenous factors, where the government wants regional film production to become more self-sufficient and less addicted to subsidisation. It remains to be seen how the new policy will be implemented, and whether the policy frameworks will be locally adapted to fit contextual circumstances (Pinheiro & Hauge, 2014, p. 93-94).

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(Endnotes)

**1 Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Here, 'regional film production' in Norway means film production outside the capital area Oslo and Akershus. A 'film region' is a geographical area that usually consists of two or three counties.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are the author's.

<sup>3</sup> <http://fuzz.no/?p=613>, accessed 09.03.15

<sup>4</sup> <http://fuzz.no/?p=613>. Accessed 26.02.15.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, 22.09.14.

## Article 2

How to Succeed with Film Production in the Regions? A Study of Key Success Factors in the Norwegian Regional Film Business.

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## **Article 2: How to Succeed with Film Production in the Regions? A Study of Key Success Factors in the Norwegian Regional Film Business**

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### Abstract

This article explores what two regional film production companies in Norway do to survive and succeed with their goals. The production of feature films in Norway is largely an Oslo-based effort, but despite this reality, there are companies in the regions that produce feature films. The analysis draws on semi-structured interviews with eight employees in two companies. *Mer Film* has in relatively short time managed to attract talented directors and establish networks with international, critically acclaimed production companies. *Filmbin* was one of the first film companies in Norway who committed themselves to the production of films for children. The article shows that success must be related to context and that reputation, talent development and choice of genre, geographical location, networking and social capital, risk diversification, entrepreneurship, organizational culture and leadership, are essential factors for the companies.

### Introduction

According to a report on the economy and financial flows in the Norwegian film business (Ryssevik *et al.*, 2014), Norwegian film production is centralized and characterized by small companies, low profitability and movies that often end up running deficits. Low production volume represents ongoing challenges for the film business, and particularly for regional filmmakers. The production of feature films, after all, is largely an Oslo-based effort, and in 2015, 80% of the funding from the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI) went to the capital area (NFI, 2015). The article discusses how two regional companies survive in a difficult business.

This is a highly relevant issue because filmmaking is important to the Norwegian authorities, who have described film as one of the most important cultural expressions of the era (St.meld. 30 (2014-2015)). It is a stated goal that Norwegian films should succeed both in Norway and internationally, and that the films should be of good quality. The national film policy also states that the film companies need to be more economically viable. Film production should be less dependent upon public funding, and also contribute to economic growth. The importance of culture as a source of

national economic growth is a talking point of both politicians and people within the cultural sector (Bille, 2013, p. 165). The government's second objective is to strengthen regional film production, in the interests of providing a real counterweight to the dominance of the capital (St.meld. 30 (2014-2015), p. 12).

Little research has looked at the actual relationships between small companies, their strategies and performance (Gibcus & Kemp, 2003, p. 41). In this context, I discuss what two well-established regional companies do to survive and succeed with their goals. I explore key success factors, with a focus on knowledge-based resources, and how the use of this competence can be advantageous (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). The article is based on interviews with eight employees in the two regional film production companies Mer Film, which has an office in Bergen, Western Norway and in Tromsø, Northern Norway, and Filmbin, which has an office in Lillehammer, Eastern Norway.

What does it mean to be successful?

Screenwriter William Goldman's remark "Nobody knows anything" is often quoted as an illustration of the uncertainty in the film business - it is difficult to predict a success, and the rate of financial failures is high (Simonton, 2009). According to Simonton, there are three main criteria by which a film's success can be evaluated: critical evaluations, financial performance, and movie awards. These criteria represent both aesthetic and economic assessments. Several studies focus on commercial success, including blockbusters and how to predict financial success (Collins *et al.*, 2002; Litman & Kohl, 1989). Research on critical evaluations and movie awards often relate this to financial performance as well (Ginsburgh, 2003).

This article has a different starting point. Discussing the regional film business in a small country like Norway, the concept of success must be related to its context. Profitability in the private film and television business in Norway is poor (Ryssevik *et al.*, 2014). The government's increased focus on sustainability and economic viability is related to this. The Norwegian film business is fragmented, comprised mostly of small companies with low earnings. This applies to Scandinavia as a whole as well—there are few large, robust firms, and many companies produce less than a film per year on average (Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2011, p. 9).

Secondly, as in many other countries in Europe, the government in Norway provides substantial subsidies to filmmakers in order to maintain a domestic industry. This means that the films do not have to be as profitable for the industry to survive. The companies in Norway do not solely depend on private money when financing a film and this makes their situation quite different from, for instance, the industry in Los Angeles.

Thirdly, much of the economic research that deals with companies assumes that the aim is to achieve economic growth and profitability. What distinguishes Norwegian regional film companies in this regard is that profit is not necessarily the main goal. Any company depends upon a certain amount of income, but one characteristic of people working with film (and others in creative professions) is that their creative goals, and the inner motivation they possess to achieve them, can be more important than high salaries or returns (Deuze, 2011; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Caves (2003, p. 74) calls this position “art for art’s sake”. However, as several researchers have pointed out, there is also a danger of self-exploitation (Banks, 2007; Stahl, 2009). For instance, many film workers accept low wages or working for free just to be able to work with film.

In this article, the concept of success is therefore based upon an understanding of 1), survival, since surviving as a company for more than five years is an achievement under the existing circumstances, and 2), art for art’s sake, which means relating success to the companies’ own goals. They are driven by artistic ambitions, not profitability. This commitment is possible due to public funding and various support schemes for the production of artistic films. In addition, to discuss success must also be related to the companies’ commitment to their region, and their emphasis on promoting the local film business and to use the region as a starting point for their work.

### A resource-based perspective on companies

The role of human capital and knowledge-based resources are gaining increased attention when discussing creative industries (Boccardelli et al., 2008). Edith Penrose (1959) describes companies’ growth as a process and explores the links between company resources, management’s control of these resources, and company opportunities for value creation. Strategically relevant resources for a company are, according to Barney, “those attributes of a firm’s physical, human, and organizational capital that do enable a firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness” (1991: 102). Such a resource must be (1) valuable, to the extent that the resource utilises opportunities and reduces threats in the corporate environment. The broader environment of the company creates the opportunities and threats that a business strategy has to deal with (Fombrun & Graham Astley, 1983). (2) rare with regard to the company’s current and potential competitors; (3) non-inimitable; and (4) non-substitutable with another resource. In addition, Barney emphasises that in order to be successful, the company needs to utilise their resources in a way that benefits the company.

Knowledge-based resources refer to “a firm’s intangible know-how and skills, which cannot be imitated because they are protected by knowledge barriers” (Chan-Olmsted,

2008: 166). These resources, or human skills, are important in a business context that is characterized by change and uncertainty (Miller and Shamsie, 1996: 523). Many organisational decisions are the product of a dynamic relationship between the company, its environment, and its attempt to develop and implement activities that adapt its resources to the changing environment (Chan-Olmsted, 2008: 161).

Although resource-based theory is dominant in strategy research, challenges remain as to how resources should be identified, categorised and analysed (Chan-Olmsted, 2008; Foss, 1998, p. 135). This article investigates success factors and resources based on the premises that the companies are committed to pursue artistic goals, and try to survive in a difficult business. To identify and analyse success factors, I focus on three categories: human capital, or company specific competence *within* the company. These include experience, reputation and the ability to attract talented people. The second dimension is social, or relational capital, which includes social network and ties *external* to the company, for instance the capability to activate relations with film workers in the community. Thirdly, geographical location is an important factor because the companies are committed to the local film business and because the location gives the companies some place specific advantages.

### Methodological approach

The article is based on semi-structured interviews with employees in two regional production companies, which produce fiction films. Mer Film AS has an office in Bergen and in Tromsø, and consists of three companies: Mer Film AS in Tromsø, Mer Film i Vest AS in Bergen, and Mer Filmdistribusjon AS. Owner and producer Maria Ekerhovd founded the company in 2011. She had previously produced the short film *Sniffer*, which was the first Norwegian film to win the Palme d'Or in Cannes (in 2006). She has also produced *I am yours*, Norway's Oscar candidate in 2014, and *Out of nature*, which won the award for best European film at the Berlin Film Festival in 2015. In 2016, the company had seven employees.<sup>1</sup> Producer Ragna Midgard takes care of projects in the Tromsø region, while Ekerhovd develops projects in the Bergen region. Øistein Refseth is responsible for the distribution company Mer Filmdistribusjon, and Siv Dyb Wangsmo works with finance and administration. Axel Helgeland is an executive producer, advising and mentoring Ekerhovd. Helgeland has produced a number of feature films. Mer Film is an interesting case because of their results. In just five years, the company has succeeded with producing six feature films, three short films, and five co-productions with acclaimed directors such as Wim Wenders and Amat Escalante. Their films have received good critiques, and have been screened at prestigious film festivals such as Toronto and Berlin.

The second company is Filmbin, which is based in Lillehammer, central eastern



part of Norway. Filmbin is interesting because it was the first production company in the Lillehammer area, a small film region compared to Oslo. Still, the company has survived for 12 years. Producer Trine Aadalen Lo, her husband, director Christian Lo, and film editor and scriptwriter Arild Tryggestad established Filmbin in Lillehammer in 2004. In 2009, they hired Nicholas Sando as a producer, and the four now co-own the company. Filmbin produces films for children and youth, and its first feature film, *Rafiki*, came out in 2009. It received the Norwegian cinema managers' highest award, for best children's film in 2009, and it was screened at the Berlin Film Festival the following year. The feature film *The tough guys* came out in 2013. It won the Audience Award at the Children's Film Festival in Kristiansand, Norway, and was screened at the Chicago International Children's Film Festival. In addition, the company has produced several short films. Filmbin also makes practical and organisational arrangements for other companies that do productions in the Lillehammer area, and it presents film courses and helps with the hiring of professionals. The company is now developing its third film.

The companies present interesting cases with regard to artistic versus commercial success. Both Mer Film and Filmbin have won awards for their films, but neither company has been particularly commercially viable. Nor is that their main objective—the desire to make quality films is greater than the desire to make lots of money. As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) note, the notion of “good work” is a minefield, but both companies have a common perception of success in the sense that they value creativity and autonomy, and that the creative ambitions are more important than the search for profit.

I conducted semi-structured interviews at the offices of Mer Film in Bergen and Filmbin in Lillehammer during June and August 2014. The interviews were structured around themes, and the durations were one to two hours each. In the analysing process, I read the interviews separately, and categorized the findings in each interview. Next, I compared the findings within each company before I compared the two companies. In the interpretation process, the starting point for the analysis was the research question: How do the companies, whose goals are creative and artistically motivated, go about to survive and succeed with their goals? The analyzing process does not exist within a vacuum: it is necessary to relate the research question to the situation in the Norwegian film business. This context has implications for the discussion of success factors.

Film companies rely on their good reputations when it comes to recruiting people and to securing project financing. Several researchers, as a result, have observed that it is difficult to acquire “true” information (Caldwell, 2008; Lotz, 2009). The interviewees are professionals, or what Bruun calls “exclusive” informants (2014). It is important

to remember that these companies have different goals, management expectations and tolerance for risk, meaning that they might react differently to the same set of conditions. The researcher must therefore be careful not to generalise about the industry based on the situations of only a few companies (Picard, 2002, p. 11).

The article is primarily based on interviews, but media articles about the companies are included in this study's empirical material as an additional source.

### An analysis of key success factors

Some researchers argue that small companies work hard to survive from day to day and therefore do not have time for strategic planning (Hanlon & Scott, 1993). The two companies discussed here do not fall into this category, since both have invested effort into their long-term planning. In this section, I discuss factors that contribute to the companies' success.

### Reputation, talent development and choice of genre

Work in the film industry is organized around projects and informal personal networks, and is often referred to as a network organization (Hirsch, 1972; Jones, 1996). Several studies show that reputation, successful performances, track record, and strength of ties are important to succeed (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1998; Jones & DeFillippi, 1996). Ekerhovd gained recognition when she produced the Palme d'Or winner *Sniffer* (directed by Bobbie Peers), Best Short Film in Cannes, 2006. Her reputation as a skilled producer appears to be an important reason for Mer Film's success and resulted in the co-production of the film *Everything will be fine* (2015), directed by the internationally acclaimed German director Wim Wenders. Ekerhovd had collaborated with scriptwriter Bjorn Olaf Johannessen on the movie *Dirk Ohm*, and they simply extended their work together when Wenders's production company, Neue Road Movies, developed Johannessen's new script.

The mission of Mer Film is "to develop and produce Norwegian and international art-house films by directors with a personal artistic vision".<sup>2</sup> The company wants to reach audiences both in Norway and internationally, producing one film per year, preferably made in Western and Northern Norway. Ekerhovd has achieved industry recognition for her commitment to art house films, which gives the company a competitive advantage in an industry where people privilege one's track record. This is something the company exploits in terms of securing further funding and also recruiting new talent. For example, Ekerhovd produced Bobbie Peers' short film *Sniffer*, and later she produced his first feature film, *Dirk Ohm: The disappearing illusionist* (2015). The collaborations often start with the production of a short film, to see if director and company work well together.

Like Mer Film, Filmbin focuses on artistic ambitious projects, and they want to make “films with meaning”. Producer Trine Aadalen Lo argues that to make an impact on children and youth is one way of defining success:

After producing the film *The tough guys*, we received letters from schools and kids, who thanked us for making a film that puts bullying on the agenda. That made me feel that we had succeeded.

For Filmbin, the choice of genre distinguished it from most other companies when it established itself in Lillehammer in 2004. At that time, few other companies in Norway specialised in films for children and young people. Films for children were a priority in the governmental film policy statement known as “Veiviseren” [Pathfinder] which came in 2007, but few such films followed its release. NFI director Nina Refseth stated in 2012 to the film magazine *Rushprint* that the institute typically received few applications for the production of films for children.<sup>3</sup> Thus Filmbin’s timing was good; in addition, the company’s first film received favorable reviews in the media and at festivals, which was important to establishing Filmbin’s reputation. Barney (1991) calls this a “first-move advantage”. Filmbin received so-called package-funded development from NFI two years after its first film premiered, which meant that it received support to develop three feature films. Still, competition in this area has increased since their initial capitalization, and Filmbin no longer stands out as it did before.

The companies’ choices of genre can be seen as a strategy aimed at financial sustainability—Mer Film produces art house films, while Filmbin makes films for children and youth, and both specialties have good support structures. NFI has funds for the development and production of artistic films and a film with unique artistic potential can receive grants for up to 85 percent of its development, production and promotion costs. Children’s movies can receive up to NOK nine million in ‘etterhåndsstøtte’ [ex post support], while other films can receive a maximum of seven million. All Norwegian feature films that sell more than 35.000 tickets at the cinema are eligible for ex post support. This type of support is designed to compensate for the fact that Norway is a small market, and that Norwegian films have a limited chance of success on the international market. Support is equal to 100 per cent of the producer’s net income, or 200 per cent for films for children.<sup>4</sup> Mer Film’s first project, *I am yours* (2013), and its later project *Out of nature* (2015) were both produced through NFI’s fund called Nye veier [New roads]. To retrieve and take advantage of existing funding opportunities is a necessity in this business, and both Mer Film and Filmbin have succeeded here.

Both companies also keep few employees as permanent staff and hire more people during project periods, a normal practice in the movie business that keeps costs low (DeFillippi & Arthur, 2002). The disadvantage of this, of course, is that the knowled-

ge and resources that accompany a typical project team are not available between projects.

### Geographical location as a financial and creative resource

In addition to reputation, track record and choice of genre, both companies have some advantages based on their geographical location. Mer Film interviewees noted that it is part of their strategy to use the Bergen and Tromsø region as a starting point for choosing collaborators and the kind of stories they want to tell. This local, not-Oslo focus is also a means of distinguishing the company. The employees at Filmbin always introduce the company as Filmbin from Lillehammer. While place is evidently an important part of the branding process, it also represents a financial and creative resource. As regional film companies, Mer Film and Filmbin have access to sources of financial support that are unavailable to companies in Oslo, including regional film funds and film centers, but also private funding that is locally inclined. Knowledge of application procedures and guidelines for funding is important to these companies. Film projects rely on public funding, and both Mer Film and Filmbin survive largely with revenues gained during a given production period.

Place also provides some creative advantages. Both companies enjoy superior access to regional talents, compelling scenery and region-based stories, and both staffs expressed the sense of feeling relatively unfettered by whatever might be happening in Oslo. In an industry that prizes innovation and originality, this free thinking can be very helpful. They take advantage of local talents, locations and stories, but also think global when it comes to networking, co-production, and distribution.

Lastly, regional film companies can contribute to place promotion, which in turn promotes them as well—an example of this is the television series *Lilyhammer* (Kongsrud, 2013), which brought attention to Lillehammer itself, and therefore, to an extent, to Filmbin.

### Networking and social capital

Mer Film's networking happens regionally, in that they consistently link up with local talents, but it also has a strong international aspect. Examples include the aforementioned co-productions with film director Wim Wenders, and the fact that Mexican NDM, the distribution company of acclaimed filmmaker Carlos Reygadas, distributed the Mer Film movie *Out of Nature* internationally. Networking, both regionally and internationally, allow the company to reach a wider audience, improve earnings and build its brand. Art house drama is the genre that achieves the widest circulation in Europe, as well, which is advantageous to Mer Film (Bondebjerg and Redvall, 2011: 11).

Strategic networks can provide a company with access to information, resources, markets and technologies (Zaheer *et al.*, 2000). Ekerhovd stated in the film magazine *Cinema* that Wenders opened doors for Mer Film (Johnsen, 2013). Other productive collaborations have involved scriptwriters who connected Mer Film to other companies; Mer Film's participation in international film festivals and active pursuit of international film company collaborators; and Ekerhovd's participation in 'Producers on the move' at Cannes in 2011, a talent program that promotes producers and helps them to establish contacts and networks. Olsberg (2012) describes international cooperation as a key factor of success in film, because the film industry is a global industry and the domestic market is not often large enough to recoup the costs of making a film. As a result, international co-productions have increased in Norway in recent years (Ryssevik, 2014: 30).

When Filmbin was established in Lillehammer in 2004, the film business was virtually nonexistent there, and politicians and local businesspeople were supportive. The filmmakers rented an office at an affordable price, and they received useful business consulting services. As the business grew up around Filmbin, it remained mutually supportive and regionally focused: "We look at each other as colleagues, not competitors", says Christian Lo of the film community in Lillehammer (interview). Filmbanken, which opened in 2012, is a building in Lillehammer that now houses eleven companies related to the film- and television business, including a regional film center and regional film fund. Filmbanken acts as a meeting place and Filmbin's Aadalen Lo underlines a commitment to stay local whenever possible (interview). For example, Filmbin hired Filmmakeriet, a company based in Filmbanken, to create a 'behind the movie' documentary when it shot the film *The tough guys*. Shared objectives, reciprocity and trust are aspects of social capital, and especially of those networks where participants have the same goals, have something to give one another, and expect to use one another (Fukuyama, 1995; Runyan *et al.*, 2006, p. 461).

Social capital has provided competitive advantages for Filmbin, and they contribute to the development of social capital by exchange of services and information. When Filmbin produced its first feature film, *Rafiki*, in 2009, only 20 percent of those involved, were from the region. Four years later, when they produced *The tough guys*, 80 percent of the film workers were from the area. Producer Aadalen Lo further notes that it is profitable to use local film workers, as they save NOK 50,000 per person in the budget. To hire non-local film workers represents more travel expenses and hotel costs. In addition, Filmbin enhanced the competence of local film workers by having the courage to give them new tasks. In the big picture, company staff members think this competence will strengthen the region as a film centre, which will also be beneficial to Filmbin. On a short-term basis, the company received a financial windfall, and a long-

term benefit is that it now has more local film workers with experience from feature film production. Filmbin's commitment to the local film business could be described as innovative; it involves trust, risk taking, and using human resources in new ways (Wiklund, 2006).

### Risk diversification

According to Olsberg, the ability to take a share of revenues generated by successful content is the single most important factor in determining a company's potential for sustainability and growth (Olsberg, 2012, p. 10). To this point, none of Mer Film or Filmbin's movies have generated profits that can be invested in new projects, meaning that the companies must continue to secure funding from external sources. According to Bondebjerg and Redvall, the film industry will need to be proactive and develop new strategies, rather than falling back on what they call traditional, defensive strategies (2011: 11). The traditional market window system that has a film shown first in theaters, then via DVD, pay TV and free TV, is changing, because new digital viewing platforms have disrupted DVD sales in particular and led to loss of revenue for distribution companies. As a result, the distribution companies are less willing to take chances. It is now more difficult for the production companies to get the distribution companies interested in distributing their films. In Filmbin's case, it decided to postpone the film project *From mice to men* in 2014. They were supposed to shoot over the summer but put the project on hold when the distributor pulled out.

Filmbin has chosen not to base their income solely on feature film production. Contract work gives them a steady supply of capital and is lower in risk than the development and production of films (Olsberg, 2012: 11). Because of Filmbin's risk diversification strategy, they can lean financially on other assignments.

### Entrepreneurship

Although the companies are artistically motivated, they need to survive financially. Chan-Olmsted (2008: 170-171) describes strategic entrepreneurship as the way in which companies use their resources to seize opportunities that give them competitive advantages. Although all staff members at Mer Film discuss strategies, Ekerhovd has the last word. An entrepreneurial strategy, after all, derives from "the central actor's concept of his or her organization's place in its world. This is coupled with an ability to impose that vision on the organization through his or her personal control of its actions" (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985: 260). At Mer Film, for example, Ekerhovd has hired a financial manager, which allows her to concentrate on the creative work and thereby increases the efficiency of the company. This might not sound very innovative, but many production companies are run by people without specific economic or

financial expertise (Olsberg, 2012, p. 12). Mer Film also established three companies instead of one. With one company in Bergen and one in Tromsø, Mer Film can apply for funding from regional institutions in both areas. Mer Film is also no longer dependent on other distributors, because it started its own distribution company, Mer Film-distribusjon, in 2015. This decision was based on both artistic and financial needs. By distributing its own films, Mer Film is able to represent a project that it has cultivated from the idea stage. An external distributor, on the other hand, usually arrives later in the process and has many films to handle.

The idea came from Mer Film's experience with the film *Out of nature*, which included a project position funded by Introfondet in Tromsø and Innovation Norway. Mer Film decided to see whether it could make more money on a film if it distributed the film itself. According to statistics from Film og Kino, the film sold over twenty thousand tickets, which the company saw as satisfying compared to their calculations.

Although Mer Film is not the first company to both produce and distribute films, it is a proactive and innovative arrangement that involves risk taking, and it reflects the adaptability and flexibility of the company. It took advantage of subsidies that provided funding for a pilot project to test whether distribution was something it would pursue, which made starting up the actual distribution company a less risky proposition. According to De Paoli and Hansen (2010), business support for cultural entrepreneurs has not functioned well in Norway, because the cultural sector responds differently from other sectors. According to Bille (2013: 169), one might well wonder "whether it is right to stimulate the cultural sector actively for the purpose of business development, as the industries have low earnings, and only a few are able to make money". Other researchers have pointed out that small companies are often quick to see and exploit new market opportunities, but they are often hard pressed to sustain this advantage over time (Chan-Olmsted, 2008; Dean *et al.*, 1998). Whether Mer Film will succeed with the distribution company over a long term remains to be seen.

### Organizational culture and leadership

According to Olsberg, it is important for film companies to have a strong and dynamic leader who has a vision of how the company should be developed (2012: 12). Mer Film's Maria Ekerhovd is a clear leader figure who dictates its vision. Ekerhovd has managed to cultivate trust within the company staff, which shares her interest in creating artistically ambitious movies—what they describe as her competence makes them want to work for her and Mer Film. When asked why Mer Film has thrived, finance and administrative officer Siv Dyb Wangsmo says:

Maria is the main reason. She has a strong inner compass, or intuition, on what works, plus she is very hardworking. And she takes every bit of this company very seriously, and follows up the people who are involved. Because she gives so much she also expects a lot from people around her. It is easy to be engaged by her (interview.)

According to Schein (2010, p. 219), the founder of a company has the greatest impact on its organisational culture, and her employees do indicate that Ekerhovd is good at delegating, and that they learn a lot from her. Each person on staff represents Mer Film at festivals, which is a way to demonstrate the company's strength and foster a sense of ownership and attachment to the company.

Filmbin, interestingly, does not have a leader. Three of the four employees started the company, and all four are currently co-owners. The staff has cultivated an egalitarian mindset, with a flat organisational structure that allows each of them a voice. According to Tryggestad, this has both advantages and disadvantages: "Sometimes it is a bit inefficient, because everyone can express their meaning about everything, but it's very useful also that everyone can speculate about everything" (interview). This degree of autonomy and validation can motivate good creative work. Olsberg (2012: 12), however, observes that many film companies are owned and driven by creative individuals "whose principal talents and experience lie in the business of bringing individual film projects to fruition. It is not always the case that these same individuals will have the knowledge and experience to push forward the company's growth because these are essentially different things". As long as the staff is in agreement, a flat structure works. When there are differences, on the other hand, processes can take more time, because no single person has the authority to make a final decision.

The employees of both companies are relatively self-motivated and know what to do. Few employees mean that every person is important, and because the work can change quickly, these companies rely on flexibility as well. Mer Film's Siv Dyb Wangsmo, for example, usually works in finance and administration, but occasionally in other areas: "Sometimes there is much more use for someone who can obtain fake snow, than there is for someone who can sit with the budget" (interview). She experiences this as a positive aspect of her position, and it shows that she shares the values of the company and has an understanding of how people work in the industry. This flexibility also enables Ekerhovd to include the finance person in the creative work of filmmaking. There is a culture of sharing and an emphasis on fast communication. Some researchers have pointed out that there is a lack of training in small business because these companies are not concerned with growth, or are simply too busy trying to survive (Fuller-Love, 2006). I have found instead that the companies have a "learning by doing" approach, and the organisational culture consists of shared and largely unspoken understandings. If these understandings emerge from the company's strate-



gies and dovetail with the professional environment, the company will be more likely to succeed (Küng, 2008: 173).

## Conclusion

This article asks what two regional film companies in Norway, who both produce artistically ambitious films, do to succeed and survive. Obviously, there is a huge difference between the small and fragile film business in Norway, not to mention the almost non-existent regional film business, and major film hubs in for instance Mumbai, London, or Los Angeles. Therefore, I have argued that the understanding of the ambiguous concept “success” must be discussed in relation to context. In this article, success is related to 1) the situation in the film industry, which in Norway is recognized by low earnings and low production volume, 2) art as capital, which means that, for these companies, the realization of artistically ambitious projects is more important than profitability and 3) access to public funding, which makes it possible to pursue these projects.

In addition, media products are not standardized, but instead based on creative processes and industry knowledge (Chan-Olmsted, 2008: 174). This means that small companies like Filmbin and Mer Film, which do not have much capital, are still able to succeed if they exploit the unique creative resources they possess. Based on the aforementioned context, I argue that the two companies have succeeded because they have survived for more than five years, which is an achievement considered the situation in the Norwegian film business. The article shows that human and social capital are important factors. In addition, geographical location is a factor that gives both companies a competitive advantage. They are well aware of, and take advantage of, local stories, talents, scenery, not to mention locally inclined support schemes. However, Mer Films’ results are exceptional in a Norwegian context – in five years, they have produced six feature films and co-produced five feature films. The company is innovative, as the start-up of the distribution company shows. Filmbin is less proactive and willing to take risks, and therefore chooses risk diversification. Mer Film also attracts talents because of their reputation, international network and they have a strong leader that can take quick decisions, while Filmbin has a flat structure and is more locally oriented. As DeFillippi and Arthur (1998, p. 135) argue, human capital (skills) and social capital (work relationships) form a self-reinforcing cycle of career that can either strengthen a person’s career or reverse it, depending on performance. Mer Film’s results confirm this, and they have produced far more films than Filmbin in a shorter period.

Both companies pursue art, but they also want to secure sustainability, which means finding ways to survive economically. Art and capital are often discussed as contrasts (Gran & De Paoli, 2005). What is essential is that their creative ambitions come first;

secondly, they adjust the financial strategies based upon this goal, and not vice versa. Discussing success in relation to the small and public funding addicted Norwegian film business also poses the question if it makes sense to relate success to profitability. As several studies and the latest national film policy shows, the emphasis on film as an economic product increases. However, how the companies themselves define success and see their work does not necessarily coincide with policy goals. Due to the context in the Norwegian film business, it makes more sense to relate success to sustainability and survival, than to profitability.

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## (Endnotes)

- 1 Aida LiPera and Elisa Fernanda Pirir started working for Mer Film after the interviews were conducted.

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- 2 See <http://www.merfilm.no/about-merfilm/>. Accessed 28.10.15.
  - 3 See <http://rushprint.no/2012/05/for-fa-barnfilmsoknader/>. Accessed 03.11.15.
  - 4 See <http://www.nfi.no/bransje/vare-tilskuddsordninger/kinofilm/etterhandstilskudd>. Accessed 09.02.16



### Article 3

Different places, different stories? The importance of place in regional film- and television production

Will be published in 2017 in the book  
*Building Sustainable and Successful Film and Television Businesses: A Cross-National Perspective*, ed. Eva Bakøy, Roel Puijk and Andrew Spicer. Bristol: Intellect Ltd.





## Article 3: Different Places, Different Stories? The Importance of Place in Regional Film and Television Production

Will be published in: *Building Sustainable and Successful Film and Television Businesses: A Cross-National Perspective*, ed. Eva Bakøy, Roel Puijk and Andrew Spicer. Bristol: Intellect Ltd.

Research on filmmaking outside urban centres tends to concentrate on regional development – researchers note that the cultural industries have a positive impact on tourism, place branding and the local economy (Hedling 2010). More generally, research tends to focus on how the cultural industries affect the places where they are located. However, few researchers have reversed this perspective by examining how location affects the companies themselves. In order to address this gap in understanding, I will revisit the relationship between place and filmmaking in Norway in this chapter. This relationship matters because the Norwegian government supports regional film based on the premise that film production in different places will generate more varied films. Therefore, in what follows I will look at the ways in which four regional production companies in Norway relate to their geographical location, and what being a ‘regional company’ means to their survival and viability.

After briefly situating place in relation to the political context of filmmaking, I will elaborate upon the concept of place more broadly, and then describe my four case studies. I will then discuss the relationship between these regional film and television companies and their locations by assessing interviews, websites and their latest productions. My analysis will demonstrate that place *does* matter to these companies, in terms of inspiration, the use of the local landscape in productions themselves, the use of local directors and film workers and, to a degree, the telling of stories that are identified with the regions in question. I will also reveal some of the complexities involved in promoting one’s local affiliation because regional film production is sometimes regarded as less professional.

### Place and policy

Place is an important concept within Norwegian film and cultural policy, not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a commitment to regional development. Norway has a scattered population and tensions between the political centre and the peripheries are central to the political history of modern Norway (Pettersen et al. 1996: 259). In his analysis of centre and periphery in Norway, Stein Rokkan (1987) describes how cultural opposition to the values of the central state from markedly distinct peripheries has been strong in Norway. After the Second World War, the state assumed

an active role in the modernization of Norway, focusing, initially on northern Norway. It was a national priority to develop industry and achieve equal living conditions in every part of the country, thanks to a form of exogenous thinking that believed in the redistribution of wealth and opportunities from the centre to the periphery. According to Selstad (2003), more recently the government wants growth to happen from *within* the regions themselves. As a result, the cultural industries are newly attractive to policymakers because of the positive economic effects they are believed to have. Policymakers, as mentioned above, see the cultural industries as drivers of regional development (Kearns and Philo 1993). The Norwegian government therefore wants film production to take place in the regions rather than be concentrated in Oslo. It is a policy goal that regional film should attract private investors and thereby raise more money for the Norwegian film business, but it should also contribute to tourism, place promotion and work opportunities in the regions.

For the government, place is important not only from an economic perspective. The government argues that Norwegian films are important because they are ‘carriers and conveyers of a country’s culture and expressions of culture’ (NMC 2007: 13–14).<sup>1</sup> Because American films continue to dominate the global market, public subsidies are necessary to the survival of the Norwegian film business. Regional film and television production is important to the Norwegian government because it allows for the depiction of a variety of environments and geographical locations, and the different stories, landscapes and people therein. As such, diversity is an argument behind the government’s commitment to regional film. This commitment rests on the understanding of and television productions as cultural expressions of Norwegian culture and identity and therefore they should represent the whole country and not just Oslo.

This commitment to the regions has also manifested itself elsewhere in the media landscape. Local newspapers have historically strong roots in Norway, and the two public service broadcasters, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) and TV2, are specifically obligated to cover the entire country, not simply its population centres. In NRK’s guiding principles, for example, article 14 reads as follows: ‘The NRK shall strengthen Norwegian language, identity and culture: a. NRK shall reflect the geographical diversity in Norway and supply locally relevant content, and have a local presence’. NRK must buy at least 10 per cent of its productions from external companies; from 2018, that number increases to 40 per cent (NMC 2015b) to enhance the variety of productions from all over the country and to strengthen continuity, competence and professionalism within the Norwegian film and television industries. According to its franchise, TV2 is supposed to produce news and actualities, while at least 50 per cent of the content should be

produced by a Norwegian company (NMC 2000). The location of TV2 in Bergen, the second largest city in Norway was, and still is, much debated. However, NRK's head office was in Oslo, so it was preferable to locate TV2 somewhere else. Twenty years later, media professor Knut Helland is able to point out that the television business in Bergen would probably not exist at all if not for TV2 (Algerøy and Molde 2012).

### The meaning of place

As Arefi (1999: 180) explains, the concept of place is extremely challenging because it does not lend itself to a definite interpretation. For one thing, its scale varies from the size of a country or a region to a neighbourhood. Secondly, its meaning and purpose suggest different things to different people; for some, it carries a significant emotional, cultural and/or historical value manifested in local, regional or national identity. For others, however, place signifies a location for economic transactions. Paasi (2002) points out that 'region' is often associated with governance/territoriality at a level between local and national. Researchers sometimes use 'region' and 'place' synonymously, and even the people in the production companies do not always distinguish between the place (city) where those companies are located and the region surrounding it.

Following John Agnew (2014), I will draw upon three interpretations of place, summarized as sense of place, locale and location. Though these are broad categories, I will focus on aspects of them that are relevant to this chapter. *Sense of place* relates to place identity, thoughts, feelings and emotions. In this analysis, it encompasses the ways in which production companies identify themselves as regional and the impact of place upon those who work there. *Locale* implies a focus on praxis, or place as a context for social interaction in everyday life – for example, the ways in which production companies relate to the local film business, local institutions and festivals that exist in the region. *Location* links place to economic activities, materiality or the landscape, including the particular physical attributes of a specific place, including mountains and fjords. Different nations have different national landscapes (Sörlin 1999: 104), and film and television production can contribute to promoting them, thereby taking part in shaping the collective image of a country.

In recent years, place has gained renewed attention in the context of an increasingly globalized or integrated world; today's perpetual movement of people, capital and information undercuts the supposed uniqueness of specific regions and their peoples (Askanius 2010; Paasi 2002). Giddens (1991) and Bauman (1992), among others, argue that places are less important to people because of this mobility and new communications technologies: 'The urge of mobility, built into the structures of contempo-

rary life, prevents the arousal of strong affection for any place' (Bauman 1992: 695). Others, such as Massey (2004, 2005), Gibson-Graham (2002), Shuman (1998) and Escobar (2001), argue that place does matter and consider local places in terms of local agency rather than globalism.

In this chapter place is understood as something changeable, in the sense that the global affects the local, and vice versa (Massey 2004). Because production companies actively seek international distributors and producers, their understanding of place must also acknowledge the global. Massey therefore argues against a deterministic global versus local dichotomy, and further refuses to see the local as a victim of globalization: 'For places are also the moments through which the global is constituted, invented, coordinated, produced. They are "agents" *in* globalisation' (Massey 2004: 11). While this chapter argues that local places still matter, it remains cognizant of the ways in which an increasingly global media industry can influence companies in particular places.

## Method

I conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen employees in the offices of Original Film, Mer Film, Flimmer Film and Filmbin. Original Film, based in Tromsø, northern Norway, produces documentaries and shorts and is in the process of producing its first feature film. Mer Film, which has an office in Bergen, western Norway and in Tromsø, produces and distributes feature films. Flimmer Film produces documentaries and commercials. Although the company is situated in Bergen, one producer works at what the company calls the 'district office' in Oslo. Filmbin, located in Lillehammer, in central eastern part of Norway, produces feature films for children and teenagers and serves as a local facilitator for other film companies, also running film courses for schoolchildren.

I selected these four companies because they have years of experience – all have survived for more than five years. These companies were also able to provide me with interviewees who all worked full time, in contrast to those companies that have a single employee and that are often staffed by part timers (Ryssevik et al. 2014). Geographical diversity was another important criterion, given the topic of this chapter. Tromsø and northern Norway were interesting because this region is furthest from Oslo, the hub of Norwegian film production, and research on northern Norway typically focuses on questions of centre and periphery, otherness and remoteness (Paulgaard 2009; Guneriussen 2008). Bergen and western Norway represent the largest and most active film region in Norway after Oslo (Ryssevik and Vaage 2011; Ryssevik et al. 2014). Lillehammer belongs to the inland region and, from a Norwegian perspective, is quite close to Oslo (190 kms). Unlike western and northern Norway, the inland region is

young in terms of film production and Filmbin was one of the first film companies to establish itself there.

This chapter also incorporates analyses of the companies' websites. In addition, it analyses the companies' four most recent productions to exemplify place affiliation and expressions of diversity.<sup>2</sup>

### How the companies relate to place

In this section, I will use sense of place, locale and location (Agnew 2014) to introduce a discussion of how the companies relate to their geographical situations. I will also compare the significance of place as gleaned from the interviews with the presentation of place on the companies' websites and in their productions themselves, in order to extend and deepen the discussion. All unattributed quotations are taken from the semi-structured interviews.

### Sense of place and company identity

The identity of the company is how the company defines itself. Employees shape and are shaped by this identity and they are expected to identify with the company as well (Alvesson 2013: 35). What assumptions, meanings and values are important to the company and those who work there, in this case specifically in relation to place, or geographical location?

Original Film interviewees most strongly emphasized their place affiliation. Producer Mona Steffensen described the region as follows: 'I think it has to do with identity. The products we deliver get better because we have a regional connection'. In fact, she claims to be taking part in 'building northern Norway' because Original Film productions inform the audience about northern Norway and, in short, 'put northern Norway on the map'. She emphasizes that all places have their stories – that 'we live in a country called Norway, and that is not just Oslo or eastern Norway'. According to Eriksen (1996: 11), northern Norway boasts a particularly strong and shared identity. On one hand, northern Norway has been described in negative ways, as a subsidized periphery that does not contribute enough to the GDP. On the other hand, it is also called the region of opportunity.

Any consideration of Norwegian film is also a political question, because the film industry relies on funding from the government according to a policy premised on what kind of films should be produced. The production companies' use of genre, content, location and local film workers is a matter of identity, because the films are intended to tell Norwegians something about who they are. For example, Steffensen emphasizes her industry's impact on reducing prejudice, noting how the television

series *Hjerterått* focused on Sámi/Norwegian relations, and how Original Film made it a priority to portray Sámi culture to the general public. To Steffensen, filmmaking is not only about economic and creative decisions but also a matter of representation. By showing different places, stories and people in their films from northern Norway, Original Film wants to alter impressions of this region and contribute to an understanding of what it is to be Norwegian.

According to Mer Film owner and producer Maria Ekerhovd, the regional aspect is fundamental:

It is important to our choice of project, director and location. We work with directors who want to make films here, and on locations that they have a relationship to. To make films, or to make art, is to say something about who we are. And who we are is also where we come from. And that's an important part of our common history, or a reference point for who we are, and therefore I think it's important for the artists that we work with to make films at the location where they come from, places and nature and people that they know and have a relationship to (Maria Ekerhovd, interview).

According to Drake (2003), place can be a catalyst for individual creativity; Ekerhovd argues the same – that place attachment matters as a reference point and a source of inspiration for the directors with whom Mer Film works. This also demonstrates Ekerhovd's awareness of the company's place affiliation and of the importance of geographical location to the company profile and choice of projects: 'To be located outside the centre gives a different perspective. Maybe it is easier to do things differently than if you are part of a homogeneous environment in the capital where people do things almost the same way'.

Filmbin also emphasizes being 'outside' as an advantage, because its place inspires the company to see things differently. Producer Trine Aadalen Lo noted:

When we lived in Oslo, we were too concerned about what the others were doing, instead of cultivating our company and what we really wanted to do. I think that moving to Lillehammer resulted in us being more 'free'. We are not so concerned about what the film workers in Oslo do; we are not following the sheep flock (Trine Aadalen Lo, interview).

This perspective – place as an inspiration for new and different ideas – resonates with the aforementioned goals of the government to draw upon different environments, voices and stories to express diversity through film (NMC 2015a: 71).

Flimmer Film producer Johnny Holmvåg, who works in Bergen but is from Harstad in northern Norway, expresses a different attitude towards the company's regional affiliation: 'We haven't thought about ourselves as regional. Some have an inferiority complex towards Oslo. "Big, ugly Oslo has everything". That is nonsense. If you have good projects, you have more funding possibilities here than in Oslo'. Holmvåg thinks

that it is a ‘mentality thing’ and that a regional attachment would possibly be more important at Flimmer Film if all of its employees were from Bergen. While the other companies actively promote themselves as ‘outsiders’ in a positive sense, Flimmer Film, by contrast, does not want to be regarded as ‘regional’ but as a national and international company. From time to time, Flimmer Film has found that some people involved in the film business in Oslo seem to think that the regional film business is less professional. Producer Lars Løge addresses this in the Norwegian film and television magazine *Rushprint*, where he argues that competence does not only exist in Oslo and that regional, professional film workers contribute to different stories and quality films (Løge 2015). Research also confirms that a reputation as ‘regional’ or ‘local’ can lead to stigmatization within the cultural field (Mangset 2002: 89).

Only two of my fourteen interviewees are directors, but both of them recognized the subjective feeling of place as important to the kind of stories they want to tell. Eivind Tolås says he derives inspiration from different sources, including media, books and conversations, but also from his surroundings in Bergen and western Norway where he grew up: ‘It is something about knowing and liking this coastal area. I think it affects how you think, and it is a starting point for me to tell my stories.’ Place attachment also matters for Filmbin’s Christian Lo in his work as a director of films for children and youth:

As a storyteller I use my own background and childhood as a frame of reference and I feel that the stories I have a heart for are kind of district stories, small-town stories, more than big-city stories, because that is what I know and can say something about.<sup>3</sup>

The place in itself becomes important, even necessary, for his work because he identifies himself so closely with this environment. What he describes, in effect, is not primarily the physical surroundings (location) or place as a context for social relations (locale) but place as something subjective.

For Original Film, Mer Film and Filmbin, place is important to the companies’ identity and is a way to be distinctive. Their starting point is regional, which means that they try to locate their projects in the region and use local film workers. For Flimmer Film, there is also a regional starting point, but place is not important as a value or an identity marker.

### ‘Building the region’: Place as locale

Agnew (2014: 26) describes locale as a context for social relations and interaction. In the present context, being located in a region outside the centre means that production companies sometimes have to rely on professional expertise from Oslo or elsewhere because the necessary skills are not available in their location. Low

production volume is one hurdle for the regional film companies and this lack of opportunity means that many film workers move to Oslo, which has become more or less self-sufficient when it comes to production skills. Regional companies, on the other hand, search actively for new, local talents and use festivals, educational institutions and their networks to find people. In this way, the companies support their regional economies while saving on the costs of travel and accommodation that accompany the importation of Oslo talent.

Competence building is common to all of the companies discussed here. Original Film, according to producer Mona Steffensen, tries to be a 'talent development factory'. Producer Ragna Nordhus Midtgard says Mer Film tries to hire local film workers, and that the company accepts responsibility for the survival of the local film business in Bergen. Producer Johnny Holmvåg also emphasizes this priority but admits that the options for film workers are sometimes few. Even though Flimmer Film does not promote itself as a regional company, it cultivates actively local film workers and educational institutions. For example, staff members are guest lecturers for the media students at the University of Bergen, and sometimes students also work for the company. To prevent film workers from moving to Oslo, Flimmer Film developed a department within the company dedicated to producing commercials. There they can train new film workers and retain expertise and a larger workforce, even when overall production volume is low. When the company does have bigger projects or needs extra film workers in a hurry, these people can be readily transferred from the commercial department.

Filmbin, the first film company in Lillehammer, has been very active in building a film business there from scratch. To encourage the development of competence in the region, they use local film workers. Producer Trine Aadalen Lo describes a communal culture among the film workers in Lillehammer, who all try to promote and support one another, because 'if everyone gets stronger, it will benefit all of us'. In a region where the overall business is small, Filmbin's cultivation of local talent leads to more jobs and more money remaining in the local community.

The interviews demonstrate that the companies take a holistic approach to place as locale, meaning that they are aware of the ways in which local film workers, the place and the companies can benefit one another. The companies represent professional opportunities for local film workers and local film competence means that the companies do not have to spend extra time and money bringing outside film workers to the region. This dynamic reinforces the conclusions of those researchers who argue that the cultural industries can have a positive impact on employment in the regions (Skoglund and Jonsson 2012). It also shows that even though the companies, especially Mer Film and Flimmer Film, profess an international focus or scope, the contact between



them and their local film business, educational institutions, film festivals, television broadcasters and regional film funds and centres remains vital.

Nature as a selling point: Place as location

Location is ‘the geographical area encompassing the settings for social interaction’ (Agnew 2014: 28) – in this context, I understand it to be the physical surroundings of the companies. I wanted to find out if the companies promote or show their place affiliation. Their websites show how the companies want to be perceived by the world and make a vital first impression. To what extent, then, do these websites reflect what the interviewees say about the importance of place and location?

Original Film’s website demonstrates that nature and location are central to the company. The first thing one sees is a picture from a documentary in production called *There’s Always Next Season*. It shows a man in the air on a snowboard with spectacular mountains and blue sky behind him. Above the picture, it says:

Original Film is located 600 km north of the Arctic Circle, with the energy from the Gulf Stream, a flaming aurora above the dark snowy winter landscape, and bright nights during summertime. We live and work in an area of contrasts, and love it!

Clicking on ‘Learn more about us’, the next image shows Tromsø by night, surrounded by mountains covered in snow, with the northern lights in the sky above, accompanied by high-flown rhetoric about the advantages of being based in Tromsø, ‘the Arctic capital – Paris of the North [. . .] a bright oasis sheltered by high mountains, surrounded by two powerful straits and the ocean as its neighbour to the west’. The textual commentary also claims that Original Film wants to tell universal stories from a local point of view, connecting the company’s mission directly to its location.

My interviewees confirmed Original Film’s emphasis on location. According to Stef-fensen, the surroundings represent an advantage for the company: ‘When I present my projects and they see the spectacular locations, especially the mountains and sea and, not least, the northern lights, they want more of it, no doubt about that’. Producer Eric Kama said that Original Film’s access to exotic natural conditions and stories from the Sámi cultural area help the company to stand out.

The interviewees at Mer Film underlined the importance of place and regional affiliation, but the website does not reinforce this. There, instead, one sees a loop of pictures from the company’s completed and ongoing projects, as Mer Film introduces itself as a production and distribution company located in Bergen and Tromsø. The text does not address regional or local aspects of their work but instead describes the

kind of films they produce (art house), presents some of the directors with whom they work and celebrates what they have accomplished. This is despite the fact that the owner, Maria Ekerhovd, on several occasions has talked about regional filmmaking, film policy and government subsidies for film. Like Original Film, Mer Film considers itself a regional production company that privileges local directors and stories located in northern or western Norway. One reason why the regional attachment is downplayed on the website is that the company also wants to be recognized for its competence at what it does – Mer Film is a professional company, which has produced acclaimed films. Original Film provides film services for visiting producers as well and a focus on the natural surroundings is a way of attracting those producers. Mer Film does not provide these services and does not need that dimension to their activities.

Flimmer Film's website shows images from their latest productions. A map shows where the offices are located. Above these small maps, 'Bergen' and 'Oslo' are written in big letters. Along the left side of the page, it reads, 'Some projects we do because they are important, others because they are fun'. Flimmer Film thus emphasizes the company slogan over its geographical location and the rest of the website briefly describes what it does and how it prefers to have a variety of projects underway at any given time. The presentation does not focus on any particular regional aspects because Flimmer Film promotes itself as an international, not a regional, company, as was the case in the interviews as well.

Filmbin's website is quite straightforward. They use the film poster from their latest film as a background image, and the profile picture is the company logo. Under 'Om oss' it states that the company is located in Lillehammer but does not elaborate. Of course, the content of this particular website is generally confined to contact information and a description of Filmbin's productions. Like Mer Film and Flimmer Film, Filmbin does not emphasize place affiliation on its website. Interestingly, the interviews reveal that Filmbin wants to be affiliated with the Lillehammer name, which is known internationally because of the Winter Olympics in 1994 and the television series *Lilyhammer*. According to producer Nicholas Sando, staff members always introduce themselves as part of 'Filmbin from Lillehammer'. The association between place and product in the cultural industries can contribute to a company's success, because place can become brands that companies can exploit to increase their competitive positions (Power and Scott 2004: 7).

Filmbin is also the only company that clearly states that they will not shoot abroad. Director Christian Lo expresses strong opinions about the connection between film as an audio-visual medium and filmic representations of Norway. He says that Norwegian film policy emphasizes the importance of film as a reflection of Norwegian culture, language and landscape, and he questions how it is that production companies that

choose to work abroad still manage to receive funding from the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI). Norwegian film policy does not specifically mention visual representations of landscapes, but it clearly indicates that films should mirror the breadth and diversity of Norwegian society, and describe and interpret its culture (NMC 2015a: 11). The phenomenon of ‘runaway productions’ means that companies take their work abroad because of foreign subsidies, cheap labour and other economic incentives that reduce their production costs. There is an ongoing debate as to whether this in fact weakens the Norwegian film business. What is less discussed, however, is how runaway productions affect the visual representations in films. According to Arefi (1999), one of the consequences of runaway productions is a standardization of landscape – place becomes inauthentic, or ‘fake’.

### Place and economic benefits

In addition to their powerful natural surroundings, filmmakers in the regions have the advantage of proximity to regional film institutions, including centres that grant funding to initiatives around talent and competence development, films for children and young people, travel support and the development and production of documentaries and shorts. The guidelines for this regional funding vary, but usually the film project must take place in the region, the applying company must be located there, the director or other film workers must come from the region and/or the story must have a link to the region. Regional film institutions also support the companies by giving advice or offering relevant courses. Overall, these institutions have contributed to the very existence of regional film production. In addition, the production companies in northern and western Norway have access to local support schemes, the goal of which is to give financial support to culture-related businesses. Filmbin, in the inland region, has less access to this kind of funding.

Both NRK and TV2 use freelancers and buy productions from external film and television companies, and there is generally less competition for those supplier companies outside Oslo. The establishment of TV2 in Bergen was crucial for Flimmer Film, for example, because Flimmer represents access to environments and stories that TV2 does not have in Oslo (Johnny Holmvåg, producer, Flimmer Film). TV2 is obligated to produce a variety of productions with Norwegian content and the production companies in Bergen are important as contributors in this regard.

Place in itself clearly represents an economic advantage for these companies, given that place is a criterion for getting a project financed and for receiving advice and support from the regional film institutions. However, the NFI has 600 per cent more money at its disposal than the regional film institutions and research shows that most of the funding from the NFI goes to film companies in Oslo (Sand 2016).

## Place in film and television productions

An overview of location, story and director will give us some idea of whether the productions actually reflect place and regional attachment. Comparing the productions with the interviews is also important because it tells us whether regional affiliation is something companies promote to justify their own existence and attract government support, or whether it actually matters.

Original Film's latest productions are all set in northern Norway, except for the documentary *Fata Morgana* (2013), which was directed by Zaradasht Ahmed from Morocco. The documentary *Det lengste løpet* (*The Longest Run*) (2013) takes place in Finnmark, Norway's northernmost county and is directed by Trond Brede Andersen from Tromsø. It follows two dogsled racers who compete in Finnmarksløpet, northern Europe's longest dogsled race. Gry Mortensen, who lives in Tromsø, directed *Eagle Boy* (2013), which tells the story of Sage, a Native American boy from the state of Montana in the United States, as he adjusts to a new life in Tromsø. Original Film's biggest production to date is a television series for children titled *Hjerterått* (2013). It takes place in the Sámi village of Kautokeino, in Finnmark, and tells a story about Anneli, a Norwegian girl who moves to Kautokeino, and Isak, a Sámi boy who lives there. Together, they solve a mystery, and along the way the series deals with prejudice, Sámi traditions and Sámi/Norwegian cultural issues. Grethe Bøe-Waal from Kristiansund, western Norway and Nils Gaup, a Sámi director from Kautokeino, directed the series. Original Film certainly seems to have a legitimately strong regional profile, in that three out of four productions have directors from northern Norway, locations in northern Norway and themes that are to a significant degree place and culture specific.

In the period 2013–15, Mer Film produced four feature films. Except for *Jeg er din* (*I Am Yours*) (2013), which takes place in Oslo and Stockholm, and is directed by Iram Haq from Oslo, the other films – *Mot naturen* (*Out of Nature*) (2014), *Her er Harold* (*Here Is Harold*) (2014), and *Dirk Ohm – Illusjonisten som forsvant* (*The Disappearing Illusionist*) (2015) – are all directed by people from northern Norway and Bergen. The locations of the films are, respectively, Mosjøen, a small town in northern Norway, Bergen and Grong, a small village north of Trondheim. While the settings for these three films are regional, the themes are universal. *Mot naturen* tells the story of a young man's fantasies and struggles; director Ole Giæver says he wanted to 'get closer to the core, the essence of what is recognisable and universal in all people'.<sup>4</sup> In *Her er Harold*, the main character decides to kidnap IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad because the opening of a new IKEA has caused Harold to lose his furniture shop. *Dirk Ohm* is based on a true story: a German illusionist arrives in Grong, where a young girl has gone missing. Lonely and depressed, the illusionist falls in love with the missing girl, even though he has never met her. While it is based on a 'local' story, the film touches upon

existential questions such as ‘who we are when we are present and who we are when we are gone’.<sup>5</sup> These examples show that Mer Film works with local directors, and for the most part the films take place in regional locations. The universal character of the themes, however, accords with Mer Film’s profile as an international art house company.

In contrast to the other companies, Flimmer Film has a much larger and more varied list of productions. According to general manager Thomas Løken, Flimmer Film produces more locally now than earlier, because its employees are older and have families, which limit their ability to travel. *Pistol Shrimps* (2008–) is a comedy web-series produced for NRK. One of the two directors/actors in the show works for Flimmer Film, and the show is set in Bergen. However, the location could have been anywhere, because the show mostly relies upon scenes in which the two directors edit themselves into Hollywood films and well-known television shows. *Drone* (2014) is an internationally acclaimed documentary directed by Tonje Schei about the use of drones in war; it has an international focus and the director is based in Oslo. The documentary series *Fjorden Cowboys* (2014–), however, takes place in Hardanger, a Norwegian fiord in western Norway. Hildegunn Wærness, who is from Hardanger, is the creator and director of the series and the production is entirely ‘regional’ in the sense that the producer, story, location and series creator are from western Norway. Flimmer Film’s own Eivind Tolås directed the documentary series *Døden (Death)* (2014), the locations of which are quite international – the story takes place in 25 different countries and has a decidedly universal theme. Flimmer Film therefore usually focuses on universal themes, and many of the productions take place outside of Norway, but to some degree its stories, locations and directors come from the western Norway region.

Filmbin has produced two fiction films. Both *Bestevenner (Rafiki)* (2009) and *De toffeste gutta (The Tough Guys)* (2013) are set in the region where Filmbin is located. *Bestevenner* tells the story of a young girl who runs away from the reception centre for refugees when her and her mother’s application for political asylum is denied. It is a story of friendship and courage. The theme of *De toffeste gutta* is bullying, and the film follows a young boy, Modulf, who thinks he is a superhero. The director of both films is the company’s own director, Christian Lo. Local scriptwriter Morten Hovland wrote the script for the first film, while the second is based on a book written by Oslo author Arne Svingen. According to Filmbin, the company’s stories are character driven, which means that they could take place anywhere. Filmbin’s two films are not specifically ‘local’ stories but rather universal stories that they chose to shoot in the region. Filmbin does use local film workers and tries to build their competence by giving them more important tasks. The two productions show that place matters when it comes to location and local talent, but not necessarily when it comes to story.

This overview of the latest productions demonstrates that production companies

mostly use local directors and that the locations of their films are often regional. The stories themselves tend to be more universal than place or culturally specific. Original Film has the strongest regional focus. In terms of governmental mandate, then, the companies do contribute to geographical diversity and a more varied use of film workers, even if this alignment does not necessarily result in stories that are different from those produced in Oslo.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the relationship between place and filmmaking. The interviews reveal that all the companies emphasize the importance of place. The location is a starting point for their work, both economically and creatively. The location is advantageous because it gives them access to regional funding, but it also has creative benefits, such as inspiration and free thinking, access to local talents, scenery and stories. The companies have what I would call a holistic approach to place. They all try to build their regional and local business. The relationship between place and company is therefore interdependent, which means that both benefit from the other. Unlike Oslo, the regions are not self-sufficient when it comes to projects or even competent film workers. Thus the regional companies take an active interest in local talent, festivals and education institutions, because they want to keep film workers in the region. In doing so, they also contribute to more work opportunities.

Diversity is one of the arguments behind the Norwegian government's support of regional film, which means that diversity is considered to be an important value in itself. This is based on the premise that film production in different places will generate more varied films and therefore contribute to a more democratic national cinema, where the films represent the whole country and not only the capital area. The findings here show that the companies' film and television productions do contribute to greater diversity when it comes to the use of geographical locations, but also the employment of local film workers and, to a certain degree, varied stories. In addition, the companies exercise a strong commitment to being local and to use the region as a starting point. The results therefore indicate that place matters, and that the regional film and television companies legitimize the government's funding of regional film. However, the websites reveal that only one of the companies promotes its regional affiliation and that condescending attitudes toward regional film could be disadvantageous for the companies. This is part of a hegemonic discourse where cultural production in the centre is regarded as more professional than cultural production in the peripheries (Mangset 2002). It indicates that it is better for the companies to take advantage of their regional affiliation without labelling themselves as regional but instead promote themselves as professional companies.

## Interviews

Name	Position	Date of Interview
Filmbin		
Trine Aadalen Lo	Producer	12 June 2014
Christian Lo	Director	12 June 2014
Arild Tryggestad	Editor/screenwriter	12 June 2014
Nicholas Sando	Producer	25 August 2014
Flimmer Film		
Johny Holmvåg	Producer	06 August 2014
Thomas Lokøen	General manager	06 August 2014
Eivind Tolås	Director	06 August 2014
Lars Løge	Producer	21 August 2014
Mer Film		
Maria Ekerhovd	Producer	04 August 2014
Ragna Nordhus Midtgard	Producer	04 August 2014
Øistein Refseth	Leader of Mer Filmdistribution	04 August 2014
Siv Dyb Wangsmo	Chief financial officer	04 August 2014
Original Film		
Mona Steffensen	Producer	17 June 2014
Eric Kama Steinberg	General manager/producer	17 June 2014

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(Endnotes)

- 1 All translations are the author's.
- 2 Filmbin has produced two films in recent years.
- 3 Director Christian Lo and producer Trine Aadalen Lo are married and work together at Filmbin.
- 4 See <http://www.merfilm.no/film/outofnature/>.
- 5 See <http://www.merfilm.no/film/illusionist/>.

# APPENDIX



## Appendix 1

Geographical overview of the companies



## Appendix 2

Geographical overview of the regional film centres



## Appendix 3

Geographical overview of the regional film funds, per 2017.



## Appendix 4

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### **Interview guide sample. Guide for interview with the leaders.**

#### BACKGROUND

Your name and age?

What kind of background, competence, education do you have?

What are your working tasks in the company?

#### BACKGROUND / HISTORY OF THE COMPANY

How did the company get started?

What visions did you have?

What do you produce?

Who are your customers?

How has the company managed to survive? (Which factors and competence have been crucial?)

What would you have done differently today?

What are the main challenges for the company in the future?

#### ADVANTAGES

What are the advantages and opportunities of being in the region?

The regional business is smaller than that in the capital: How might this benefit the company (support, closer contact with the local film milieu, visibility, collaboration, goodwill)?

Is there a high degree of cooperation between companies and film workers in the region?

Are there economic benefits (funds and centres, private funding, support from investors/politicians/municipality, courses, cheap office space)?

Any other advantages (film festivals, educational institutions, etc.)?

Any creative advantages (local talents, stories, landscape)?

#### DISADVANTAGES

What are the greatest challenges of being based in the region?

Do the region lack competence, and, if so, how does this affect the company?



To what extent do you need to rely on competence outside the local film milieu?

How does the size of the local film milieu affect the company?

How does the company deal with low production volume and the fact that many talents move to the capital?

Most of the film business is located in Oslo: How does that affect the company?

Any opinions on how NFI allocates funding? (Most goes to companies in the capital.)

Are there other challenges and problems that are common to the Norwegian business as a whole?

#### POLICY FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXT

Political conditions:

Has film policy and changes in that policy affected the company (changes in guidelines, increase or decrease in funding)?

How do you perceive regional film policy? What is positive? What is not?

Regional funds and centres: Should the number increase, decrease or remain as it is today?

How do you perceive the allocation of funding to regional film agencies versus NFI?

How should the government allocate funding to the regional film agencies? Equally or based on the size of the film business or the company's achievements?

Institutional:

Which institutions nearby are important and why (funds, centres, television companies, education institutions)?

What kind of relationship does the company have with these institutions?

Economic:

How do you perceive public funding?

What is good? What should be different?

Which support schemes are most important and why?

Has funding from regional film agencies/institutions been important to the company?

How do you finance your projects and which funding opportunities are most important?

#### REGIONAL AFFILIATION

Are regional film and television companies important, and why?

Why does the company want to be located here and not in Oslo?

In what ways does the company focus on the region, or not?

Does the company have strategies related to the regional (for example, the presentation of the company, use of people, choice of projects, location)?

In what ways does regional affiliation matter in the choice of projects (diversity, originality, other types of stories)?

How would you characterise this film region and its degree of professionalism?

How would you describe the local film business? How do its kinds of experience, smaller environment, expertise, networks and cooperation impact the company?

What kind of support do you receive from local businesses, politicians, others?

Is there anything else you want to mention that is specifically relevant about being located in this region?

What ideas inform the website and the company's name?

#### ABOUT THE COMPANY: GOALS, STRATEGIES AND AMBITIONS

Can you describe the company's goals?

How have they changed, and why?

What are the creative and economic ambitions of the company?

What are you doing to achieve these goals?

How can the company be better and what are the obstacles to improving?

What does it mean to succeed as a company?

Is the artistic versus the commercial a dilemma when choosing a project, and, if so, how?

What is a successful production (artistic, commercial, other)?

#### ECONOMY

What is the economic situation of the company?

What do you do to reduce costs?

To what extent is your work decided by economic aspects? Do you, for example, choose certain projects based solely on their commercial aspects?

What are the biggest challenges related to the economy of the company?

#### COMPETITION, NETWORKING

What are your strengths as a company?

What are your weaknesses?

Any challenges related to:

- Competitive situation?

- How to cultivate relations with the public (marketing, social media, etc.)?

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- Innovation and keeping ahead of competitors?

- New technologies?

Networking: How do you relate to it?

- Which contacts are important and why (politicians, local/national/international network, institutions)?

- How do you connect with these contacts and keep in touch with them?

- How do you recruit new talent and what do you do to keep it?

#### COMPANY STRUCTURE

How would you describe the company's organisation?

Hierarchy or flat structure?

How do you organise the work?

Communication within the company?

Daily routines? Working hours, meetings?

How do you make decisions in the company?

Why is the organisation like it is?

Does everybody take ownership of the productions?

What do you do to keep updated, develop your competence and contribute to developing the company (courses, watching movies, etc.)?

#### FUTURE

Why do you want to work in this business?

Do you think you will stay in the company? Why or why not?

Anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix 5

### Request for participation in the research project:

#### “The regional film and television business in Norway: A production study”

##### Background and purpose

I am a PhD student at Lillehammer University College, Department of Film and Television Studies. By exploring four production companies and the context surrounding them, I shall examine the advantages and disadvantages of being a regional production company in Norway. My research questions include the following: How does the political, economic, and institutional (proximity to fund, film centres, TV channels, etc.) framework affect the company and its goals? What have the regional companies done to survive and succeed in their goals? How is ‘the regional’ part of their strategy, and how does location impact the company’s work?

I want to interview people in four regional companies located in Tromsø, Tromsø/Bergen, Bergen and Lillehammer, respectively. I selected them because they have survived for five years and have completed several productions and received critical acclaim and/or awards.

##### What does participation in the study mean?

Participation involves an interview that will take about one hour, with possible follow-up questions by mail and/or telephone. The interview will be recorded. The questions will deal with how people in these regional production companies perceive their work.

##### What happens with the information?

All personal information will be treated confidentially. Personal information such as name, occupation and municipality will only be available to the PhD student and the transcriber assistant. The material and name list will be stored separately.

The interviewee’s name will be shown in the publication, in addition to the company’s name and the interviewee’s position in the company.

The project is scheduled to finish on March 3, 2017. After this, the material will be stored indefinitely for further research in a lockable office. No one else will have access to the material. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data has approved the study.

##### Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the study, and you can withdraw your consent at any

time without giving any reason. If you withdraw, all information about you will be anonymous.

If you have questions about the study, please contact Stine Sand, mobile 92649034, email [stine.eira@hil.no](mailto:stine.eira@hil.no).





Doctoral thesis submitted for the degree of PhD Audiovisual Media – a joint degree between Norwegian University of Science and Technology and Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences

## **Voices from the Peripheries: A Study of the Regional Film and Television Business in Norway**

This thesis is a study of how regional film and television companies in Norway manage to survive and achieve their goals in the context of a larger film and television business that is centralised, economically fragile, and subsidy dependent. Interest in production studies has boomed in recent years, but little of this research addresses regional film and television companies.

This thesis argues that one of the greatest challenges to these regional companies (and the government that supports them) is how to develop strong, sustainable regional film milieus among a scattered populace like Norway's. The regions suffer from low production volume and brain drain and the research shows that these companies rely on human resources to deal with this challenge. Policy development indicates that the public funding of regional film is mostly based on regional and economic, but also cultural, arguments—regional film, that is, should contribute to regional development, economic growth and diversity. I argue that the economic and rural political rationale for support of this business tends to undermine the cultivation of the cultural value of regional film, as well as its quality and professionalism.

However, the companies have managed to produce critically acclaimed films and the thesis reveals how the peripheral location can be a creative and economic advantage.

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