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Cine-Regio



Film.Culture360 meets with Charlotte Appelgren of Cine-Regio, the European network of regional film funds.

Cine Regio is a network of European regional film funds. What are the main activities and objectives of your organisation?

Cine-Regio's main objectives are threefold and interlinked: Knowledge-sharing, Film Policy making and to strengthen the collaboration between regional film funds – in particular co-development and co-production of audiovisual product. First and foremost, it is about knowledge-sharing. We have three fixed platforms a year where the Cine-Regio representatives meet to exchange information and best practices. We also produce an annual Focus report/study on a topic of relevance to RFF. So in “2010” the topic was on “The Digital Revolution – The Active Audience” – focusing on the opportunities and challenges we are all facing within the new digital landscape. In the long-term we would like to function/operate as a knowledge-centre – not only for our members (the regional film funds) – but also for the film sector.

Secondly, Cine-Regio is involved in film policy making. In particular we are promoting and representing the regional film funds' interests at the European and international level.

Our thirds objective is co-productions. It is Cine-Regio aims to strengthen and stimulate international co-productions and collaborations. Cine-Regio has today 33 members from 12 EU Member States, in addition to Norway, Serbia and Switzerland. Cine-Regio finds that regional film support is vital to fostering the development of the European audiovisual sector and promoting local cultural identity and democratic empowerment.

More and more European productions and coproductions receive support from regional funds. How would you evaluate these developments in the past years? What are the current trends?

It is a European tradition that public authorities at regional, national and supra-national level intervene in the film sector, as employers and as financiers. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory, there were approximately 195 public funding bodies in Europe in 2004, running approximately 680 programmes that aimed to financially support the film and audiovisual sector. Total public support budget for the film and audiovisual sector in Europe (excluding tax-breaks) amounted to around EUR 1.4 billion in 2004. 70% of this amount was distributed through national film agencies, 21% through regional film agencies and 9% was allocated at a supra-national level . (source: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2005 Yearbook: Film and Home Video, Strasbourg, 2005. The figure include 32 countries).

Over the last couple of years the pressure on public film funding has increased significantly due to the financial crisis. As you know in many Member States television is paying less, pre-sales have dropped significantly, private money is non-existing, etc. Another indication of the pressure on public funding is that for instance the regional film fund “Film I Väst” received twice as many applications for support in 2009/2010 as the previous years.

Regional public funding has acquired an increasing importance in the overall financing of film and audiovisual works in Europe. According to European Audiovisual Observatory more funding for film and audiovisual production is channelled through the various regional levels. It is important to note that in some countries the actual origin of the revenues of the regional funding bodies come from multiple sources and not only from the public entities which have created them. In Germany, for example, broadcasters contribute to some of the regional funds. In France, UK and Sweden regional funds receive contributions from the national film agencies. Germany is by far the country which provides the highest level of regional funding. It started with FilmFörderung Hamburg and soon after it was replicated into the other Länder.

From our experience, as a network of regional film funds, there are an increasing number of co-productions taking place at the interregional level, resulting in an increasing artistically, technically and creative exchange in Europe. The winner of the Golden Bear award at the 2006 Berlinale Film Festival was Grbavica, a co-production between Austria, Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of the funding was provided by Cine-Regio members Forderung Baden-Württemberg and Film Fonds Wien. This critically-acclaimed film is an exemplary case of Cine-Regio working together to contribute to the vitality of European film. More examples of film projects supported by minimum two Cine-Regio members are listed on our website: www.cine-regio.org/case-studies

The reason for listing these case-studies are that we are very aware of that producers (both in Europe and Asia) are facing big challenges in matching and fulfilling the terms, conditions and guidelines of all the various sources of finance. By presenting these case-studies we hope to increase the transparency on how film projects can be financed involving regional film funding. It would of course be lovely if we could be more detailed on the financing plans, however, I often find that producers are not interested in sharing this knowledge with the rest of the film sector.

Cine-Regio and its members are very active in promoting European coproductions. Are some of these funds accessible to non-European (let's say, Asian) productions? Have there been any exemples of Asian productions that have received support from Cine-Regio members?

I would like to stress that the incentives offered by each funds differs. The schemes can take the form of investment (acting as co-producer / equity position), soft-loan, grants and micro loan. Most of the funds are mainly financed through the local or regional government (often 60-70%). Other sources are: the national film institutes (SE, FR), funding coming directly from the state (NO). Another source is EU structural funds – though this is only in the beginning

and not for production. Another source contributing to Regional Film Funds (RFF) is television stations – which we see in both Germany and Spain. And last but not least – some of the RFF have a return on their investment into international feature films.

The regional film funds are evaluated on different criteria – but overall their aims are to support film culture, encourage social cohesion and build regional infrastructure in the specific region where it is located. The funds are indeed accessible for non-European film projects, however, in order to access the funding it is needed to team up with a European/local production company who knows about the specific schemes, criteria, etc..

If readers are interested to learn more about each funding schemes, – please go to our website: www.cineregio.org/members. Here you will find guidelines of the various funding schemes.

Film funds set by regional governments seem to derive a lot of benefits from their activities. (For example, boosting local cultural industry and other economic activities, tourism promotion, etc.) Is Cine-Regio also active in promoting/lobby this model to different cultural policy makers in Europe and in other regions? What about in Asia?

There is an increasing focus on the economic and social significance of culture and the cultural industries throughout Europe. Governments at the regional and national level have recognized the economic potential of the creative industries and specifically that of the audiovisual sector. At the regional level, audiovisual support agencies across Europe have come to recognize the economic benefits the audiovisual sector, and particularly the film sector, can bring through employment, skills training, and local spend. Regional and municipal authorities have responded to this by creating urban and regional regeneration and development policies which acknowledge the role of the audiovisual sector. The success of a region's audiovisual sector is often seen alongside the drive to create 'creative cities' and clusters of innovation and new media.

One of our objectives is to integrate new European regional film funds /assist them in setting up. In particular in the new EU member states. Currently, we are focusing on Europe. However, should any country, region, city in Asia be interested in our work/lobby we would be very happy to share this knowledge and if invited I would be pleased to present info to policy-makers, etc.. Back in 2008 I had the pleasure of attending Pusan International Film Festival, Market and Co-production Platform. In this connection I also had the opportunity to attend the 1st Asian Film Policy Forum. This was indeed very interesting and I was honored and excited about the enthusiasm among the policy-makers and officials present. Some Asian countries has set up Film Commissions – and then you can say that setting up a public fund linking to the film commission is a natural step 2.

Your website has a page on Asian-European activities, and you have lived in Singapore yourself. Are there any specific interests or projects regarding the Asian region? Do you think there will be an Asian counterpart of Cine-Regio in the near future?

In Cine-Regio we will for sure be pleased to assist and share info if an Asian counterpart of Cine-Regio was to be set up. However, as with all networks & associations it is important that the initiative comes from members (film agencies in Asia) and their willingness to collaborate and an attitude of "together we are stronger". I believe that Europe has a lot to learn from the Asian region and vice versa.

During the last 12 months a number of Cine-Regio members and producers from those regions have expressed a specific interest in enhancing and exploring collaboration with the Asian audiovisual industry. In this respect it is of outmost importance that we establish a dialogue on how to improve the basis for valuable and promising co-productions between Asia and Europe. Cine-Regio would be pleased to participate in projects aiming at strengthening the exchange of knowledge, collaborations and co-productions between Europe and Asia. However, it is important to notice that Cine-Regio is a non-profit organization and does not have funds it can contribute with to such projects.

Examples:

Within Cine-Regio, the sub-group Asia-Regio has been set up for members with a specific interest in supporting and stimulating international collaboration with the Asian region. This includes promoting producers and talents from the specific region.

March 2009 POEM Foundation (a member of Cine-Regio) arranged a seminar in Kuusamo, northern part of Finland. Producers and financiers from Singapore, South-Korea and India were invited to the seminar to present the audiovisual industry and funding possibilities in Asia to 112 Northern Scandinavian participants. After the seminar 2 feature film co-production, 1 documentary co-production and 1 possible tv-serie co-production are under development between Singapore and Northern Scandinavia. From the 32 Scandinavian companies present at the seminar, 16 has announced that they are currently changing ideas how to collaborate with South-Korea and Singapore, 11 have announced to be interested in working with Asia, but haven't found a right partner yet.

Some of the Cine-Regio members have already established a collaboration with Media Development Authority (MDA) in Singapore. POEM-Foundation (Finland) together with FilmPool Nord and Film I Västerbotten (Sweden) and FilmCamp (Norway) has been part of the Focus on Asia – seminar held in Kuusamo, March 2009 and participated to the Asia Media Festival (AMF) in Singapore 2008, finding the event a great opportunity for produces to create business relationships with South East Asia. Cine-Regio member Filas Audiovisual Fund (Italy) has also participated previous years to AMF, with producers from the region involved. In addition, Cine-Regio members from Spain, (Institut Català de les Indústries Culturals), Germany (Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein GmbH (FFHSH) and Filmförderung MFG Baden-Württemberg) and Austria (Filmfonds-Wien) have shown their interest to be part of the Cine-Regio Europe-Asian collaboration network.

In December 2009 a delegation from Cine-Regio went to Singapore to present the Film Arc project and Cine-Regio in a conference at Asia Media Festival. They also met with the MDA. The result of the meeting was that MDA and Film Arc agreed to formalize an agenda and a structure together with the goal to increase co production in various sectors, such as; film, TV, games and animations. It was a great experience for me attending and many good contact were made. Read more here: www.cineregio.org/subgroups/asia

Are there any policies/tools/schemes of Asian countries that inspired or impressed you and/or other members of your network?

Asia is a growing market also for audiovisual industry; it would be beneficiary to European producers and public funders to learn more about the collaboration possibilities Asia has to offer.

A long term goal is to keep being involved in collaboration network between Asia and Europe to nourish co-production possibilities, share best practises among public funders, and open a gateway to European produces to explore Asian markets and vice versa.

By attending Asia Media Festival we learnt about AV-policies of different Asian countries, - incl. new schemes for funding and distribution possibilities, new co-production opportunities and new business models.

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