

Module 7 – Development, an underestimated stage in the production process?

Questions to Claus Ladegaard, Deputy Director and Head of Film Funding at the Danish Film Institute

How much money does the DFI give to films?

There is, in total, 20 million Euros for feature films. There is no fixed or maximum support amount, but in reality we have never given more than 1.5 million Euros. In average, we provide 25-30% of the budget (60-70% for arthouse films and around 15% for mainstream films).

How many projects in development eventually receive production support?

Amongst the early development projects, the ratio of the ones that end up in production is 1:6, and when it comes to advanced development, the ratio is 1:2 or 1:2.5

Can you, after the second grant of development, decide not to finance production?

Yes we can. 7-8 years ago, the number of the projects that received development support and the ones that entered production was basically the same. Producers knew that development funding necessarily leads to production funding, which basically turned development funding into pre-production funding. However, after we revised the development scheme, we have closed down a number of development projects where we already spent 100,000-200,000 Euros. However, most often we do that upon agreement with the producer and director.

Do you have performance indicators?

We do not measure success because it is not always visible or measurable. On the larger scale, in the last 8 years, we can definitely say that the quality of the films we made has been increased and the audience has grown.

Can directors or scriptwriters apply alone?

When it comes to features, they can apply for initial development funding (for making a treatment, doing research or writing a script). But for a more advanced development stage, there must be a producer attached. A lot of directors apply on their own, but not a lot of scriptwriters and we encourage them to initiate new projects themselves.

What is the average proportion between the money you put into development and production for the same film?

The average proportion is 20-80, but it depends on a project. Some of them involve uncalculated costs because sometimes Commissioning Editors can be engaged in their projects for weeks, reading scripts, reading drafts, having meetings, and going to testing sites.

How long does a development phase last?

Some ideas are quite clear and they can be developed in several months. Some are vaguer and it can take up to 2 years. But we are trying to have development support increased and development time shortened.

And what happens with rejected projects?

One of our basic rules is to provide a detailed reason for every rejection. Producers can come back and apply to another commissioning editor. There are three of them for documentaries and three for fiction films.

How does this development philosophy fit into co-production schemes?

We support around 10 minority co-productions every year. And that is only for the films that enter production. Some years ago we used to have a co-development scheme, but we closed it because co-developments often involved more than one commissioning editor attached to the same film, which created conflicts. We prefer one-to-one relation. We are now starting co-development treaties with different countries. We have a co-development agreement with a region in Northern Germany for feature films, and soon we will sign a co-development agreement with CMF (Canada Media Fund) for transmedia projects.

How do you make people accept the development strategies you propose?

We only suggest what they should do. We also try to make sure that everybody working at the DFI knows about the projects in development, so that they can learn the methods from one project and apply the knowledge to another. We also try to connect DFI producers and commissioning editors with other people from the industry (production designers, etc) to teach them what and how they work, because all that knowledge helps in making better suggestions and decisions in the future.

Who green-lights the production support after the development phase is finished?

A DFI's funding team consists of a commissioning editor, producer and a person in charge of marketing. However, it is the commissioning editor who decides whether or not the support will be given, whereas the producer decides how much money will be allocated.

Are producers happy with this idea that the DFI engages so much in the development of their projects?

This is the way we work and you can take it or leave it. There is the market scheme that is rather producer-driven, so those who hate interference can go for that scheme.

Who is the contact person in the fund for the producers from the market scheme who receive development support?

On a daily basis that would be one of our two DFI producers. When it comes to story, characters, content, etc. it would be the editorial board.

Is Danish television involved in any way?

They are quite close, but they do not have a say in the decision-making process. Two broadcasters have to provide about 10 million Euros each per year for Danish films.

Do you think this development would be possible without the commissioners' system you have?

Our market scheme, TV drama funding scheme, computer games and transmedia schemes are run by editorial boards. However, it is a lot easier to be a development partner through the commissioner's scheme.

How close are commissioners? Do they talk about projects?

They know about each other's projects, but they can discuss them only on a very general level. If a commissioning editor has any doubts about his projects, he can discuss it with either the head of fiction or the head of production and development, but not with another commissioner.

Are commissioners always Danish?

No. At the moment we have one Swede and we will have another Swede soon. To be a commissioner, you have to speak the language, so basically they can be Swedes, Norwegians or Danish.

How close are the commissioning editors and the project team once the project enters production?

It depends. In the case of the above film *War*, the commissioning editor and the director-writer kept a close relationship even throughout the production. As a general rule the relationship does not have to exist after development.

Who chooses which commissioning editors takes which projects?

Producers decide which commissioning editor and team they apply to with their project. And it never happens that one has more projects than the others. It is similar in Norway and Sweden.

What do commissioning editors do when their term expires?

They either go back to what they were doing before or take advantage of their commissioning period to re-educate themselves and afterwards become either producers or script-doctors. However, we have recently encountered some kind of professionalization of commissioning editors. Danish commissioning editors sometimes go to Sweden to replace Swedish ones who come to Denmark. This is in one way good, but sometimes we need new people who can bring freshness. The ideal combination is that some of them are professional commissioning editors and some are new fresh ones from the film industry.

Have you ever encountered corruption within the commissioners scheme?

We are not a very corrupt society. We are a small business and people avoid conflict.