Behind the Scenes of International Co-productions:

Understanding the decision-making processes of European co-producers in international co-productions

Student name: Noemie Ries
Student number: 543608

Supervisor: Jolien van Keulen

Master Media Studies - Media & Creative Industries

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC)
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Thesis
June 2021

Abstract

International co-productions have experienced a massive increase in the last years in Europe and across the globe, which is reflective of the changing market conditions and globalization processes. As a result, transnational media practices and international partnerships have become a standard in the current media landscape. Such transnational collaborations raise questions concerning the universalization in media production and cultural homogenization. Furthermore, the development of a transnational field in which the national and international interconnect, has led to a growing emphasis on transnational and global audiences. International co-productions also raise questions regarding the co-operation between media professionals and potential cultural differences that can lead to tensions due to diverging national interests.

Consequently, by interviewing co-producers that operate in the film industries of smaller European countries (Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland), this study aims to answer the following research question: *How do international co-productions shape the development and content of films?* By using the theoretical perspective of production research, this thesis analyses the experiences and decision-making processes of European co-producers involved in international co-productions. Its aim is to identify the organizational and structural factors that influence the decisions of professionals during the collaboration and understand how international co-productions shape the development of the content and final output of a co-produced film (narrative, script, cast, crew). The data for this research consists of six qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted with European co-producers and the data was analysed by means of a thematic analysis.

The findings of the research suggest that the decision-making of co-producers during the development is shaped by a variety of factors, reasoning, and motivations. It is often a combination of financial, creative, and personal reasons as well as regulatory and organizational influences that drive the decision-making of producers. In regard to the influence on content, the findings imply that international co-productions tend to predominantly produce 'global' stories and universal themes that can be widely understood by a large audience. International co-productions tend to avoid very local topics, which however doesn't mean that such productions are not produced at all. In contrast, despite this focus on universality, the results suggest that such universal stories are often embedded in very local settings and contexts. Such productions however require a combination of a well-written script, an interesting cast and/or renowned producers/directors.

Key words: transnational partnership, transnational media production, globalization, international co-production, production studies

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Over the last 30 years, the global media landscape has changed extensively. Globalisation processes, conglomeration, industry deregulation and digitalisation have pathed the way for new conditions that have restructured and transformed the creative industries ever since (Havens, et al., 2009; Baltruschat, 2010). The expansion of media production as a business sector and the many technological developments over the last decades have contributed to an increase in transnational media production and international distribution as media producers have adapted to international production practices (Baltruschat, 2003; Steemers, 2014; Paterson et al., 2016). The many economic, societal, technological, and political changes that have taken place since the 1990's have consequently also had an impact on the production of media texts. The ongoing process of the internationalisation and transnationalisation of media production is, for example, evident in the growing trends of format franchising and the global trade of TV formats, the popularity of interactive media as well as the increase in international co-productions (Baltruschat, 2010; Kuipers, 2011).

International co-productions in the film industries have experienced a massive rise in the 1990's and have since become the norm for financing film productions in Europe (O'Connell, 2015, Bondebjerg, 2016). Over the last 10 years, for example, the film production in Europe boomed by a total of 47% and European countries co-produced with over 150 European and non-European nations (Talavera, 2018). They are therefore a perfect demonstration of the increase in transnational media production. International co-productions can be defined as an involvement of two or more producers from different countries who are collaborating creatively and/or financially on a specific project (Hammett-Jamart, et al., 2018). Some well-known examples include the films *Dunkirk* (2017), *The Three Musketeers* (2011) or *Call Me by Your Name* (2017) as well the TV shows *The Bridge* (2011-2018) or *The Team* (2015-2018).

International co-productions have had a long and significant history in the European film and TV industry. The first financial co-ventures date back to the 1920's, which have established a constant circulation of crew and talent across national borders up until today (Hammett-Jamart, et al., 2018). Especially in their early days, co-productions were supposed to facilitate and enhance collaborations between countries with smaller production industries in order for them to be able to compete in an international market (Baltruschat, 2010). Co-productions have provided smaller nations with an opportunity to combine financial, technical, and creative resources with other countries. Additionally, besides being able to share finances and thus a way of managing the risks of a production, co-productions also provide an excellent opportunity to share and transfer creative and technological knowledge amongst the participants (Szczepanik, 2016; Hammett-Jamart, et al., 2018).

According to Hammett-Jamart (2018), international co-productions are situated at the nexus of national and international policy jurisdictions and therefore embody all tensions inherent in the modern global context: local vs international, protectionism vs expansion and culture vs commerce. They are firmly located in a regulatory framework that is influenced by international, supranational, and national policies and guidelines. It is therefore important to understand how these tensions translate into the everyday work of industry professionals in order to unravel the taken-for-granted processes and practices in a transnational media environment. By identifying these organizational influences, this research aims to explore the decision-making processes of co-producers in an international co-production to better understand how such cross-border collaborations influence the media texts that are produced.

Furthermore, the rise in transnational media production has also led to an increasing orientation towards international standards and global audiences (Kuipers & de Kloet, 2009; Kuipers, 2011). This focus reinforces the growing concerns of cultural homogenization and lack of cultural specificity in media production (Baltruschat, 2003; Tinic, 2003; O'Connell, 2015). The growing emphasis on transnational audiences consequently raises questions about the potential limitations on genres, ideas and/or subjects that might potentially be disregarded because they aren't suited for an international audience. This research aims to address the debates in media production studies that are concerned with the internationalization of media practices (Kuipers, 2011) and the growing emphasis of international co-productions on the production of 'global' stories that fail to critically address and reflect on societal issues (Baltruschat, 2003). Especially with co-productions that involve a partnership on the creative level, these are some noteworthy concerns as the creative professionals need to compromise on aspects concerning the content of a production (narrative, cast, crew, aesthetics, music, filming locations…).

In view of this predominant focus on an international audience and the transnational and regulatory environment within which international co-productions are situated, they are an interesting topic to study and raise many questions. What kind of forces shape the national and transnational media production? How do cultural differences impact the production processes and the content? What role do audiences play and what kind of audiences tend to be addressed (international and/or national)? How do producers agree on different national expectations and interests? How do public funds influence the production? What factors determine the producers' motivations and decisions regarding the selection of co-producing partners? These are some questions that this research aims to address.

Considering all of this, this research focuses on producers that are involved in the creative development of internationally co-produced films. By analysing their experiences of the processes in

international co-productions, this thesis aims to understand co-producers' decision-making during such a production. This, in turn, will provide more insight into the workings of transnational media productions and offer an in-depth perspective, which will eventually lead to a more complete understanding of the influences and forces that shape media production. Furthermore, given that the development phase of an internationally co-produced project is a key stage that includes many central processes that eventually impact the final output (finding budget, cast and crew, reworking the script), it presents the main focus of this research (Szczepanik, 2018b). Consequently, with a focus on co-producers that operate in smaller European countries and by using the perspective of production studies, the research question of this research is as follows:

How do international co-productions shape the development and content of films?

The thesis has two sub-questions:

SQ1: What factors guide the decision-making of European co-producers in the development phase of an international co-production?

SQ2: How does an international co-production shape the storytelling and content of co-produced films?

Scientific Relevance

Much academic literature has covered the debates surrounding the transnationalisation of media production, including the global trade of TV formats and international co-productions, extensively over the last years (Baltruschat, 2003; Kuipers, 2011; Bondebjerg, 2016; Jones, 2016; Szczepanik, 2016; Chalaby, 2019). A lot of this literature is, however, primarily focused on the political and economic consequences of the internationalisation of media production and the implications for the respective national industries. Not much research has, however, focused on the micro-structures of these transnational processes and investigated what transnational media production actually means for the professionals working in these field (Lotz, 2009; O'Connell, 2015; Paterson et al., 2016). Even though the political economy approach can reveal larger lessons about the media industries by shedding light on the organizational and regulatory frameworks and structures, understanding the role of individual agents is just as important in the context of transnational media production (Baltruschat, 2010). In order to find out how globalisation, conglomeration and digitalization have contributed to and influenced transnational media production, it is essential to also consider and examine media texts, production practices and critical discourses in the industry (Hilmes, 2014). This is why this research is scientifically relevant as it aims to address this lack by focusing on the individual agents and their experience and perceptions regarding transnational media production and international co-productions.

Societal Relevance

This research is relevant for both industry professionals and media consumers. Given that transnational media production is influenced by a variety of forces (societal, political, cultural, and technological), studying the behind-the-scenes and inner workings of media production can reveal much larger lessons about how the media operates. By identifying how an international co-production is organised and by understanding what factors guide the decision-making of co-producers, the research can be of great relevance for the professionals. It can unfold the inner workings and the subtle but evident influences that shape media production and consequently media texts. By shedding light on the underlying and taken-for-granted processes in international co-productions, creative professionals are able critically reflect on their daily work and its corresponding influences.

The study is also socially relevant for audiences as it can uncover how international partnerships and the organizational and social forces shape the media texts that they consume. Issues concerning the standardisation and universalisation of media products and the potential lack of cultural specificity in media texts are prevalent concerns of scholars that also affect media consumers (Baltruschat, 2003; Tinic, 2003; Kuipers, 2011). By understanding and being aware of how transnational media production and media texts are constructed and influenced by the social and political forces, media consumers can critically reflect on their media consumption and recognise how they might personally be affected by the consumption of global media products.

To answer the proposed research questions, the thesis is structured into five chapters. The second chapter covers the relevant theory concerning globalisation and transnational media production more generally and provides a short overview of international co-productions. Furthermore, it discusses theory relating to the relevance of nation states in international co-productions, the potential tensions that can arise during transnational partnerships and the role of audiences and their impact on the genres and stories that are produced. The chapter closes off with a short overview of production studies research. The third chapter explains the research design of this study and provides a detailed description of the data collection and the data analysis. The fourth chapter discusses and interprets the main findings of this research, and the final chapter contains a conclusion which provides an answer to the research question, reflects on the limitations of the study and closes with recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter covers the theoretical framework of this research. It firstly situates the research within the broader debates of globalisation and the transnationalisation of media production. Then it shortly discusses how international co-productions can be differentiated as well as the significance of national and international policies for co-productions. Following that, it discusses the relevance of nation states in the context of international co-productions and the possible tensions that can occur in transnational collaborations. Lastly, it elaborates on the role of audiences and discusses how international co-productions can influence the content, genres and topics that are produced. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of production studies research.

2.1. Globalisation and Transnational Media Production

Over the last decades, the media landscape has undergone a lot of changes and has transformed into, what Baltruschat (2010) describes as a global media ecology. Globalisation has contributed to various economic, societal, financial, and political changes in the world that inevitably have also had an impact on the media industries across the world. According to Appadurai (1996), globalisation has contributed to 'cultural flows', which refer to the idea that cultures across the world influence each other through five interrelated 'scapes' that characterise the various processes of globalisation. He defines these five configurations as the growing global mobility of people (tourists, immigrants, refugees…), the constant flow of media and information, (24-hour news…), the rise of technology (the Internet, smart phones…), capital (rapid movement of money across borders, credit cards...) as well as political ideas and values. Robertson and White (2007) define globalisation as consisting of two directional tendencies, firstly an increasing global connectivity and secondly an increasing global consciousness that contributes to a 'shared' sense of the world. These globalisation processes have been studied extensively in academia over the last years, covering debates concerning the relationship between the 'local' and the 'global' (Robertson & White, 2007; Kuipers & de Kloet, 2009), cultural homogenization and cultural imperialism (Appadurai, 1996; Tomlinson, 2007; Gray, 2014) as well as the relevance of nation states and the idea of 'belonging' in times of an increasingly globalising world (Morley, 2001; Jin, 2020).

Emergence of an International/Cosmopolitan Audience: Global vs Local

With all the societal and economic changes as well as digitalisation and the technological developments that have taken place over the last decades, people are increasingly connected to the world in a way that was not possible before. A key feature of the 21st century is our dependence on

the 24-hours communications technologies, which have made accessing information from all over the world and consuming foreign media products whenever and wherever we want part of our everyday life. Today, we are constantly exposed to media products from all over the globe with news channels and media outlets constantly feeding us with an overwhelming amount of information. We are therefore increasingly aware of what happens beyond our national borders. Technological developments (the Internet, smartphones…) and digitalization have thus brought the 'global' much closer to us now (Baltruschat, 2010). This integration of the global into local experiences is also discussed by Kuipers and de Kloet (2009) who link it to the idea of 'banal cosmopolitan'. They note that media illustrates one of the most visible demonstrations of globalisation as it provides people with a constant flow of images and stories from all over the world.

Appadurai (1996) and Tomlinson (2007) discuss the notion of deterritorialization in this context. The term here refers to the idea that the 'cultural flows' and the globalisation processes influence and change how we experience 'our local'. Globalization is therefore also challenging the significance of the geographical location of a culture (including its self-definitions, cultural practices, and ethnic boundaries) which, in the traditional understanding, are closely tied to a 'fixed' place (Tomlinson, 2007).

In their study on audience reception, Kuipers and de Kloet (2009) note that nationality is gradually losing relevance in media production because media products nowadays often don't have a 'clear' nationality anymore. They argue that the "denationalising" of media production and the existence of globally connected fan communities point towards the emergence of a transnational or cosmopolitan audience. This potential development consequently also impacts the production of media texts that aim to reach as many people as possible. By, for example, having multiple storylines, including a wide variety of characters and/or adding a variety of attractions, media producers increase their chances of reaching a large and diverse audience across the globe (Kuipers & de Kloet, 2009). This emergence of a cosmopolitan audience, however, raises concerning questions regarding cultural homogenization and universality in media production. Especially with international co-productions that tend to target an international audience, the universalisation and standardisation of media production adds to these existing concerns.

Nonetheless, despite the ongoing processes of globalisation and the potential emergence of a global or cosmopolitan audience, nation states in fact still present a central concept that needs to be considered in the context of globalisation (Robertson & White, 2007). Their role and their potential impact on media production will be discussed in more detail below.

Transnationalisation of Media Production

According to Paterson et al., (2016), the growing mobility of labour (skills, but also cultural consciousness) that cross national borders are a significant feature that influences the processes and practices of transnational media production. The media industries have, for example, seen a rise in transnational media companies that have set up local subsidiaries in various countries to facilitate local adaptations of global TV formats and transnational media production in general (Chalaby, 2019). Furthermore, with the growth of such transnational media corporations such as Endemol Shine or Freemantle Media, it has become very important for production companies to effectively communicate with each other to ensure and facilitate the exchange of relevant information and knowledge concerning local markets (van Keulen, et al., 2019). These transnational practices demand new ways of working across borders and a need to optimize the management practices to ensure that local productions can run as efficiently as possible. Szczepanik (2016; 2018a) also highlights the significance of knowledge transfer for local workers in a global production network. This transnational exchange of information and knowledge raises some interesting questions regarding power dynamics between the participants. Given that international co-productions involve interdependent relationships between individual agents, transnational collaborations can inevitably lead to conflicts and tensions, which will be further discussed below.

Furthermore, the changing market conditions, due to the privatization, deregulation, and conglomeration in the media industries, have contributed to an increasingly transnational environment which is reflected by the popularity of format franchising and the global trade of TV formats as well as the rise in international co-productions (Baltruschat, 2010). This development has consequently also led to an increase in the international distribution of media products (Steemers, 2014). Furthermore, technological developments and the emergence of streaming services and VOD platforms have enabled the digital distribution of films and TV shows and made it much easier for consumers to access and consume foreign media (Drake, 2018). Being able to view and access media products from all over the world encourages the idea of a growing international and global audience and thus reinforces the concerns of universality in media texts.

2.2. International Co-Productions in Times of Globalisation: History & Short Overview

Given the many developments of the global media landscape over the last decades, the practice of international co-productions has increased extensively over the last 30 years in Europe and across the globe (Talavera, 2018). As a response to the growing dominance of U.S. productions in the European market, a lot of European countries have introduced protective measures in the form of content regulations and cultural import restrictions to support their national industries

(Baltruschat, 2010; Hammett-Jamart, et al., 2018). National governments were motivated by the desire to see European films compete with Hollywood's big budget films and wanted to find ways to facilitate transnational productions between European nations. This, however, posed many challenges because the national funds that had been established in European countries were strictly benefitting the national industries. To overcome this, many European countries have adapted their national film policies to ensure comparable national film funds that would support schemes for the development and distribution of co-productions (Mitric, 2018). Furthermore, they have established and signed intergovernmental co-production treaties, which were also supposed to facilitate collaborations between European nations.

According to Hammett-Jamart et al. (2018), the diversification and increase in co-productions in Europe can be explained by two policies introduced in the 1990s. Firstly, the increase of public money distributed through specific schemes were meant to encourage international co-productions. In 2016, there were more than 270 public film funds across Europe, which alone administered on average around €2.53 billion annually (Talavera, 2018). The second policy that has strongly contributed to this increase was the introduction of numerous proactive initiatives of the European Council, such as the dedicated co-production fund Eurimages in 1998 as well as the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production in 1994. These new favourable conditions stimulated co-productions between larger and smaller nations which was one of the objectives of these initiatives (Hammett-Jamart, et al., 2018). Over the years, international co-productions have therefore developed into a dominant trend in international film and TV production with an increasingly international and global audience in mind (Baltruschat, 2003).

There are several ways to classify an international co-production. Parc (2020), for example, distinguishes between a corporation-led co-production and a state-led coproduction. Whereas the nationality of co-producers in a corporation-led co-production doesn't play a role, it is highly relevant in a state-led co-production as it determines the kind of government resources and incentives that the production can receive. A corporation-led co-production, on the other hand, exists between partners whose primary goal is to simply increase their efficiency to be able to create the best possible outcome for their work. In contrast, a state-led co-production is government-funded and is usually based on an official treaty or agreement. A state-led co-production is therefore often purely financially motivated compared to a corporation-led co-production. Whenever an international co-production is mostly financially motivated instead of by the desire to creatively work together, it often leads to a phenomenon known in the industry as "Europudding", which is strongly criticised by film critics and industry workers alike (Drake, 2018). The term is used to describe so-called "unnatural" co-productions that consist of bland and indistinct mashups of foreign storylines, characters, traditions, locations and cast (Jones, 2016; Szczepanik, 2018b).

Another way of categorising international co-productions is by differentiating between official and non-official co-productions (Baltruschat, 2010). In Europe, an official co-production, also known as co-production treaties, are formal inter-governmental agreements, which are essential to the European film industry. In order to facilitate and stimulate co-productions among European countries, national governments have signed treaties that provide a legal basis for national producers from different countries to cooperate (Mitric, 2018). Such an official co-production receives 'national treatment' and is therefore eligible for public support schemes in the respective home countries (because they are regarded as national productions) and therefore allow easy access to multiple foreign markets. This privileged treatment is evidently one of the central incentives for producers to collaborate across national borders (Baltruschat, 2010; Hammett-Jamart, et al., 2018). Non-official co-productions, on the contrary, are considered joint ventures between producers on a private basis and between countries who don't have an official treaty. Non-official co-productions can be compared to the definition of corporation-led co-productions discussed by Parc (2020).

Depending on the objective of transnational media productions, one can further distinguish them by categorising them as either creatively driven (e.g. a cross-border story), financially driven and/or capital driven (with the intention of exploiting economic benefits, e.g. tax credits) (Jones, 2016). Similarly, Hjort (2009) identifies nine different types of transnational production. Three of them are comparable to the above-mentioned categorisations: affinitive, opportunistic, and globalising transnationalism. Affinitive transnationalism is centred on the tendency of collaborating with those who share similar linguistic and cultural characteristics. Opportunistic transnationalism refers to the productions by which the selection of partners is driven by monetary factors. Lastly, globalising transnationalism are productions that aim to attract a global audience and recuperate high production costs (often by using big budget special effects and a star cast). The objective of transnational media production can therefore often differ depending on various factors and the personal preferences of the individuals involved. According to Jones (2016), however, most often international co-productions are financially motivated with a clear objective of obtaining higher production budgets.

Besides having a higher production budget and the possibility to share creative and technological resources and knowledge across borders, international co-productions also generally generate a higher number of cinema admissions and are distributed more widely compared to purely domestic productions (Jones, 2016; Drake, 2018). According to Drake (2018), this wider distribution can be partly explained by higher production budgets that are quite common with multinational co-productions, but also because of the involvement of multiple co-producers. Having producers that are familiar with the domestic market and the audience in their respective home

countries, an international co-production can strongly benefit from their professional knowledge and input, which can eventually contribute to a wider circulation of the production.

2.3.   Relevance of Nation States in International Co-productions

Despite nation states having lost some authority over the last decades, they can still be highly relevant to the national media industries and play a big role when it comes to the distribution and production of media content. Despite the processes of globalisation, there are some central elements of media policies, such as funding, media law as well as international negotiations with supranational bodies (e.g. the EU), that continue to be primarily determined by nation states (McElroy, et al., 2018; Jin, 2020). Especially, public broadcasting remains very bound to national structures because PSB's remits emphasise their responsibilities towards the national public (McElroy et al., 2018). To counter the dominance of US productions in the global market and to protect their local culture, many European nations have introduced cultural policies in the form of quotas, subsidies, tariffs and tax credits that are meant to support the domestic film industries (Crane, 2014).

According to Hammet-Jamart (2018), such policies can greatly influence the creative elements of a production because of all the criteria in international, national and regional regulations that need to be met. Especially in the case of multinational co-productions that are dependent on financial support of numerous public film funds, satisfying all the criteria can be a challenge to producers. Whereas official co-production treaties are aimed at expansion and international co-operation, national and regional funds tend to focus on protecting and supporting local culture and creating opportunities for national industries and economies (Hammet-Jamart, 2018). Each national film fund that is involved wants to ensure that co-productions adhere to their objectives, namely, to protect their national culture and/or benefit their creative industries by ensuring employment for local workers. Having to fulfil all the respective requirements of the public funds can therefore influence the project in a negative way if it leads to "unnatural" narratives and co-productions being associated with "Euro-pudding".

Besides the financial support of national funds, the European Union has also introduced a variety of schemes and programmes that are meant to encourage cross-border productions. Drake (2018) notes that, given the scattered and relatively small-scale nature of the European film and television industry, there is a need for supranational co-ordination for, without such support, there would simply be no "'European' industry but rather a collection of disparate national industries" (p. 84). This is why the EU has set up schemes and programmes meant to encourage European countries to harmonise their national support structures. Additionally, many governments offer further incentives and additional funding to films that are produced in their countries with specific

conditions, such as part of the budget being spent within their territory or the film being shot there on location (Drake, 2018).

According to Bondebjerg (2016), the European cultural policies (EURimages, MEDIA…) can provide a framework for stronger transnational media production as the funding schemes, programmes and workshops are aimed at strengthening the relationship among European producers. Development workshops, for example, can contribute to a certain 'Europeanness' as they gather like-minded people from different countries to create a supranational community (Mitric, 2018). At the same time, they raise question about a possible 'European identity'. Film and TV co-production played a vital role in the cultural and economic integration of Europe. Whilst national governments wanted to create economic opportunities for their domestic industries, international co-productions were also meant to foster a pan-European identity (Baltruschat, 2010). The intent of promoting European values has also been one of the underpinning objectives of Eurimages (Drake, 2018). The ideas of a 'European' identity and the promotion of 'European values' bring back attention to the concerns regarding cultural homogenization and universalization in media production.

2.4.   Possible Tensions in International Co-productions

According to Baltruschat (2010), transnational media production is not only embedded in and influenced by national and organisational cultures (e.g. regulatory frameworks such as cultural policies) but they are also characterised by individual agents that are part of a transnational business network. She defines these networks as consisting of short- and/or long-term collaborations, a global mobility, highly different working conditions and digital technologies that facilitate communication across borders. Given the collaborative nature of an international co-production, such transnational partnerships can therefore unsurprisingly lead to possible tensions and conflicts between the individual agents due to power differentials, unequal access to resources or simply because of general diverging interests (Baltruschat, 2010). An international co-production is based on interdependencies between individual agents that can influence the transnational partnership and consequently lead to tensions due to different working conditions or styles.

Furthermore, besides the evident tensions that can arise between the individual agents, international co-productions also exemplify the conflicting and inherent contradictions within cultural production, namely generating industrial benefits on one side and creating a cultural form of expression on the other. According to Baltruschat (2010), co-productions present "the dichotomy of culture and economics, which inevitably lies at the core of film and television as artistic, cultural, educational and informative media, on the one hand, and industries, on the other" (p.25). Each nation that is part of an international co-production has their own national and/or regional policies

and guidelines that determine the conditions for support for local productions in that particular country. International agreements (e.g. co-production treaties) and national co-production guidelines as well as national and regional policies determine an organisational framework that can influence the international partnership and consequently shape its final output (Hammett-Jamart, 2018). An official co-production therefore embodies all the existing tensions between the international and local, cultural protectionism and expansion as well as culture and commerce. Some of these cultural objectives can range from wanting to ensure that films in a particular language or stories about particular cultural or geographical regions continue to be produced, whereas the economic objectives can include the creation of employment for local workers, maintaining production infrastructure or stimulating the economy (Hammett-Jamart, 2018). The balancing of said economic and cultural benefits from international co-production can therefore transform into divergent interests on a national level and negatively influence a production if the creative professionals don't share the same mindset (Baltruschat, 2010; Kuipers, 2011).

Tensions related to creative involvement

The risks, revenues and responsibilities among co-producers tend to be distributed according to the financial contributions of the countries involved, which leads to the distinctions of co-producers into majority and minority producers (Hammett-Jamart, et al., 2018; Levie, 2018). Majority co-producers are usually the initiators of a project and tend to contribute the largest proportion of financing, are thus running the most risks and have the most say in terms of creative decisions. Minority co-producers, on the other hand, contribute the smallest proportion of financing, often come on board at a much later stage and therefore often have little involvement in the creative decision-making. Being a minority co-producer has several advantages (accessing other markets, developing professional relationships) but it also includes some challenges, as outlined by Levie (2018) and Szczepanik (2018b). Levie (2018) notes that, minority co-producers are often merely considered a source of financing rather than a creative partner, which consequently can lead to tensions if the producers are not on the same page.

According to Szczepanik (2018b), minority co-productions allow for a unique transfer of knowledge for smaller national industries. Furthermore, they allow smaller nations to pool technological and creative resources and work with renowned producers and directors, while not having to risk and invest too much money. Nonetheless, if too many partners are involved (and thus too many national funds that have to be satisfied), the creative focus and the sense of primary responsibility of a producer can get lost (Szczepanik, 2018b). This can consequently influence the production in a negative way and lead to 'Euro-pudding' co-productions, which again emphasizes

15

the significance of co-producers sharing the same creative vision and having mutual trust before entering into a co-production.

Whenever international co-productions aren't just limited to financing, they often involve a close collaboration on the creative level as well. According to Baltruschat (2010), international co-productions therefore risk to de-contextualise local identities and cultural characteristics as producers often have to find compromises during this creative process. Regarding the storytelling and the creative control in co-productions, Bondebjerg (2016) differentiates between two types: a single creative coproduction and a bilateral creative coproduction. An example of a coproduction that has allocated the creative control to one single country is the TV series *Forbrydelsen/The Killing.* This is a collaboration between Germany and Scandinavia, but the creative control is completely allocated to the Danish TV-station DR. Contrary to this is the series *The Bridge* which is an example of a bilateral creative coproduction between Sweden and Denmark. The two nations worked closely together not only on the financing and production of the show, but also during the creative process (Bondebjerg, 2016). Given that the narrative of the show is based on a cultural encounter between these two nations, a co-production and transnational storytelling is especially relevant and makes sense in terms of the creative elements. This 'natural' and transnational storytelling can be very successful, but such creative co-productions that involve more than one country can also cause problems in the production and the reception. Different national ways of directing or acting styles can collide, which can then often lead to such co-productions being associated with the critical term of "Euro-pudding" in audience reception and reviews as described earlier (Bondebjerg, 2016). This emphasises the potential difficulty that international co-productions can face and raises questions about how producers deal with different ways of storytelling in an internationally co-produced project.

Tensions due to national/cultural differences

Moreover, since international co-productions usually involve partners from multiple countries, tensions due to national differences are also possible. McFadyen et al. (1998) have studied how much cultural differences between participating countries impact international co-productions. They found that co-production partners in different countries also experience different benefits and drawbacks which can often be traced back to cultural differences. Some of the benefits that they highlight are the sharing of costs, experience, knowledge and resources as well as the access to more than one market. The drawbacks that they have found include the high coordination costs, increased shooting costs and, the loss of control and cultural specificity (McFadyen et al., 1998). Different business practices can also impact a collaboration. Co-producers need to share a similar creative vision for a project to ensure that potential conflicts are kept to a minimum.

Bondebjerg (2016) and Baltruschat (2010) further note that transnational collaborations usually follow patterns related to cultural and linguistic proximity, meaning that nations are more likely to enter into collaborations with partners with which they already have an affinity beyond economic and commercial interests. This ensures that cultural differences are kept to a minimum even though this is of course not necessarily always the case. Tinic (2003) however notes that international co-production agreements between countries are actually rather dependent on the congruent regulatory environments in the participating countries and actually less on cultural or linguistic similarities.

One of the biggest problems of co-productions in Europe isn't necessarily due to creative differences or different mentalities between professionals but rather because of differing accounting structures in the participating countries (Hammert-Jamart, 2018). Particularly when a lot of different public funds are involved in the financing of the film, it requires more work to co-ordinate everything as these funds often demand the reports to be in a specific way. According to Hammert-Jamart (2018), it is therefore not necessarily a problem of cultural or national differences between European producers but rather because of national authorities having a national mind-set. The high coordination costs (long-distance travel and communications across borders) as well as having to deal with national government bureaucracies are therefore also considered some of the drawbacks of international co-productions (McFadyen et al., 1998; Baltruschat, 2003).

Furthermore, according to Redvall (2018) and Mitric (2018), another key challenge often encountered in transnational collaborations is the language barrier. Especially when a production is being co-developed by two or more countries, the language can present a big challenge (Mitric, 2018). Scripts that are written in one language have to be translated into another (mostly English) so that everyone who is involved in the development phase is able to give comments and feedback. This can become a financial burden if there are numerous drafts of the script that need to be translated and revised.

2.5.   The Role of Audiences and the Focus on 'Global' Stories

Previous research in media studies on globalisation and transnational media production have also analysed what these changes mean for the audience and the content that is being produced. O'Connell (2015) and Tinic (2003) have both questioned the impact that international co-productions have on the storytelling and the narratives. Tinic (2003), for example, raises questions about whether international co-productions and global media productions might lead to a lack of cultural specificity in media content, particularly for smaller nations. According to Tinic (2003), international co-productions that are aimed at a global or international audience tend to avoid producing content that includes too many culturally specific elements (specific locations, very local

topics…) as it would have a diminished appeal for viewers that are not familiar with that particular culture. Instead, producers tend to favour universal themes with stories often taking place in non-defined locations. As discussed earlier, this potential focus on an international/cosmopolitan audience can influence how creatives decide to portray certain topics or subjects in order to make them as accessible as possible, which risks losing local authenticity.

Furthermore, Szczepanik's (2018a) study on Czech producers revealed that local producers don't usually produce content for specific target groups but rather tend to address the widest possible audience across all age and/or social groups. This is an interesting finding as it potentially explains the tendency of smaller nations to produce content for an international audience in order to be able to reach as many people as possible outside of their home country. Since the domestic audience of smaller countries are often not profitable enough for local producers to merely produce content for them, there tends to be an increasing focus on attracting a transnational audience, which consequently also has an impact on the content. Tinic (2003) further notes that, if given a choice, domestic audiences will most likely always watch local content over foreign productions assuming the quality is the same. This coincides with other work in media studies, amongst them Straubhaar 's discussion on cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 1991; La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). Nonetheless, the increasing emphasis on an international audience brings further attention to the potential risk of cultural homogenization and the lack of culturally specific narratives in media production.

Nonetheless, despite cultural homogenization having been a concern within media studies for decades, the last years have proved this to be somewhat obsolete. Especially with the rise of streaming services that tend to produce a combination of international content that is dubbed into local languages and local content that is specifically created for subscribers in their markets (Lobato, 2019). This means that audiences can nowadays access and watch foreign-produced content easier than ever, which is also reflected in the global success of shows like *Casa de Papel* or *Dark*. It seems as if language is not as significant anymore since a lot of broadcasters and audiences have recognised that shows and films don't necessarily have to be in English to be internationally successful (Harris, 2018). The last years have shown that audiences are interested in watching local content that embed universal themes and stories into very specific local settings (Lobato, 2019).

This development provides an exciting opportunity for both filmmakers and the audiences as it shows that there is no need (if there ever was one) to avoid cultural specificity to create shows or films that reach global success. As already outlined earlier, however, the emergence of a transnational audience does raise questions about whether the content that is produced is too restrictive in its themes and narratives by potentially only focusing 'global' stories (Baltruschat,

2003). This is especially true for internationally co-produced content that inevitably involves compromises in the creative process (Hilmes, 2014).

Additionally, previous research on international co-productions has found that some genres, such as adventure, documentaries, science fiction and animation, travel much better than others and are therefore also preferred genres for internationally co-produced texts (Baltruschat, 2003, 2010). These are unsurprisingly all genres with narratives that don't include detailed culturally specific elements (no definite location or time) in order to increase their universal appeal. Furthermore, by producing texts that have multiple storylines and a variety of different characters (young, old, fantastic, human…), producers are aiming to attract a large and diverse audience (Kuipers & de Kloet, 2009). According to Baltruschat (2010), co-productions often feature 'global' characteristics and prefer to portray emotional storylines and human relationships as this increases their global appeal as well. Universalizing stories at the expense of local and cultural specificity is consequently also one of the main criticisms of international co-productions (O'Connell, 2015). In contrast, local productions, for example, often cover more local subjects and critically reflect on societal issues (Baltruschat, 2003).

2.6.   The Perspective of Production Studies

This research uses the theoretical lens of production studies since it focuses on the microstructures of transnational media production by interviewing individual agents that operate in the industry (in this case European co-producers). Whereas the political economy approach looks at the macro level of industry studies with a focus on the larger level operations of media institutions, production studies rather focus on the microlevels and the role of individual agents that are often ignored in macrolevel studies (Havens, et al., 2009; Lotz, 2009).

Contrary to the political economy approach that does not consider the role of individual agents, the theoretical focus of production studies centres on the notion of production as a culture and is interested in understanding "how people work through professional organizations and informal networks to form communities of shared practices, languages, and cultural understandings of the worlds" (Mayer, et al., 2009, p.2). The production studies approach is therefore particularly useful to analyse the everyday interactions of cultural productions, which Havens et al. (2009) describe as the 'helicopter view'.

Caldwell's (2008) influential work on industrial practices in the film and TV industry in Hollywood emphasises the need to consider industrial practices as meaning-making processes that are often ignored by the macro approach of political economy studies. Everyday rituals and procedures can provide valuable insights into why and how certain cultural texts and media forms are produced. Purely academic theory is missing out on how professionals make sense of their

everyday world and these practices. Caldwell's work highlights the relevance and importance of professionals' "self-theorizing talk" and "trade storytelling" because it can uncover how the conventional everyday practices might lead to hegemonic norms that eventually contribute to the hegemony of the texts that are produced (Lotz, 2009).

Some of the most relevant concepts within media industry studies are discussed by Havens and Lotz (2017). They argue that there are a variety of conditions and practices (economic, organizational, creative, regulatory, and industrial) that can contribute to and influence the behaviour of media outlets and individual agents. They identify three levels of influence that interact with each other: the mandate of a media outlet (their main goals), the conditions under which the industry operates (available technology, regulations and legal rules, economics…) as well as everyday practices of organizations (creative practices, distribution, and auxiliary practices).

Another concern that prevails in media industries is the degree of autonomy and agency creative professionals have. This also refers back to the tension between structure and agency discussed by Havens and Lotz (2017). They identify three main influences that can impact creative workers' visions and their individual decisions: the general culture itself, formal and informal professional expectations as well as specific organizational practices and norms. Furthermore, another concern that is often discussed in media industry studies is the tension between making profit and creating art, which refers back to balancing the economic and cultural benefits of media production.

This research aims to build on studies that have already been conducted on European creatives working in the media industries. Szczepanik (2018a), for instance, has focused on Czech film producers and looked into what it means to be a 'European' producer in today's media landscape. While he concludes that it's not possible to 'define' what it means to be a 'real European' producer, he identifies a few potential indicators that emerged in his interviews. These include, amongst others, having the ability to follow one's own creative intuition and vision, to enter international co-productions and be able to distribute these films across borders, to benefit from national and European funding schemes and to have the ability to invest enough financial, technological and human resources into the development phase of a production (Szczepanik, 2018a).

Szczepanik (2018a) further notes that the development phase of any production is a key stage and of great importance to the overall production and consequently the final output. He describes the development phase as the work that surrounds the initial concept and story idea, including the acquisition of the idea, the screen-writing process, the raising of development fees as well as the initial stage of planning the production. He further emphasises that producers are also responsible for finding the crew and cast for the production and for securing the budget and

researching the shoot. Given that the development phase requires a lot of decisions-making regarding the final creative output, this research will primarily focus on this stage.

Conclusion

As discussed in this literature review, the various globalisation processes, the many technological developments as well as the global connectedness and interconnectivity have led to new market conditions and practices that influence the daily life of creative professionals. It is therefore not surprising that these processes have also strongly impacted the production of media texts. By using the theoretical perspective of production studies, this research aims to identify these organizational and regulatory forces and understand how they shape the decision-making of producers and the content and final output of films. By understanding how some of the concepts raised in this theoretical framework (nation states, audiences, cultural proximity, national funds) influence the development phase of an international co-production and the content of media texts (storytelling, narrative, cast, crew), the research aims to complement the macrolevel studies in media and production studies.

3. Method

To ensure transparency as well as the validity and reliability of this research, the following chapter will provide a detailed description of the research design and the methodological choices of this study (Babbie, 2016). The chapter includes a justification of the research methods used to answer the research question as well as a thorough description of the sampling and recruitment process of the participants. It also includes an explanation of the data collection including the operationalisation of the topic list. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of the data analysis.

3.1. Research Design

The aim of this research is to identify how international co-productions shape the development and content of a film by understanding how the decision-making of co-producers throughout the production process is guided by concepts relating to national differences, national funds, cultural proximity, and the role of the audience.

As the purpose of qualitative research is to understand social phenomena with regard to how people interpret and make sense of them (Boeije, 2010; Brennen, 2017), a qualitative approach is the most suitable method to answer the proposed research questions. Qualitative interviews allow to capture interviewees' personal views and perceptions concerning their own experiences of social phenomena (Johnson, 2011). Consequently, the research has taken a qualitative approach by interviewing exclusive informants (in this case, European co-producers) that are currently active in the film industry.

As these informants possess exclusive and expert knowledge, the purpose of interviewing them is to access this exclusive information to be able to understand and gain insight into the workings of media production (Bruun, 2016). For this research, the aim was to analyse the experiences of these individuals regarding the various processes in international co-productions and understand how the decisions in the development phase as well as the final output of such a project are influenced by the various factors raised in the theoretical framework. According to Bruun (2016), media products are created within an organizational framework that is influenced by a variety of social forces (political, economic, cultural, and technological), which is why exclusive informants, and their specific knowledge are needed to gain an insight into the behind-the-scenes of media production.

Consequently, the data for this research was collected by means of factual and semi-structured life-world interviews that aimed to seek descriptions and explanations of the world of the interviewees and understand the inner workings of media production (Bruun, 2016; Brinkmann &

Kvale, 2019). Semi-structured interviews are based on a topic list that cover a variety of topics while at the same time allowing for flexibility and changes throughout the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019). By interviewing professionals in the field, I was therefore able to gain in-depth insights into their daily routines and personal experiences regarding international co-productions as well as their interpretations on various topics relevant to this research, such as cultural differences and benefits and drawbacks of transnational partnerships.

3.2.   Sampling and Recruitment Process

Given that the research uses the perspective of production studies, I aimed to interview creative professionals that are actively involved in the decision-making processes of international co-productions. The sampling criteria were therefore based on film producers who have long-standing experience with international co-productions and who have been part of international co-productions with a variety of smaller and larger European countries. In order to compare findings and obtain other insights and different point of views, I aimed at interviewing co-producers from multiple countries. Furthermore, I decided to focus on co-producers in smaller countries because of their reliance on international co-productions. The sample of the research was constructed by using both purposive and snowball sampling as qualitative research most often relies on deliberately selecting cases or participants to study a specific phenomenon (Flick, 2007).

The recruitment process proved to be challenging. The exclusiveness of the targeted informants separates them from other types of informants as their expert knowledge cannot be replaced by other interviewees (Bruun, 2016). Consequently, being aware that gaining access to experts working in the creative industries can be quite difficult, I made sure to approach as many professionals as possible by sending out emails to a wide range of film production companies across Europe (including the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, and Switzerland) which fit with the above-mentioned sampling criteria. Because of my personal background, I firstly approached producers that operate in Luxembourg as a starting point of this research.

The final sample consisted of a total of six producers from five different film production companies. Four of the interviewees work in Luxembourg, one interviewee operates in the Netherlands and one participant is working in Switzerland. For a detailed description of the sample, please see Appendix A. I contacted four of the participants personally by email, whereas the other two contacts were established through snowball sampling. Despite the small sample size, the interviews proved to be very insightful and revealed a lot of relevant information regarding the processes in international co-productions.

3.3. Data Collection

Regarding the structure and planning of the interviews, I followed the guidelines suggested by Johnson (2011), Bruun (2016) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2019). Additionally, given that I did elite interviews I made sure to do pre-interview preparation as suggested by Mikecz (2012) in order to familiarise myself with the interviewees' backgrounds, their culture and surroundings. By gaining inside knowledge prior to the interview, it was much easier to build rapport and respond and follow-up on insights and perceptions discussed during the interviews.

Due to the current pandemic, all interviews were conducted online and recorded by using Zoom. The interviews themselves were conducted in Luxembourgish, German and English. I transcribed all interviews and eventually translated the quotes presented in the thesis into English.

Additionally, given that this research relied on interviewing professionals in the field, I ensured that the participants were well aware of the ethical implications of this study. I provided them with an informed consent form that included information regarding the nature of the research and the potential risks and benefits of their participation. To protect the interviewees' identities, I anonymised the answers and only provided relevant information that concerns their experience in the field. Furthermore, after the interviews, I safely stored the data (audio recordings and transcripts) on an external device.

In regard to the operationalisation of the research question, I produced a topic list that covered all the relevant concepts that were of interest for this study. As explained earlier, the main focus of the research and consequently the interview questions concerned the development phase because it is a key stage that involves a lot of decisions, negotiations and discussions concerning the final output (Szczepanik, 2018a). The interviews lasted on average around 50 minutes (the shortest lasted 40 minutes, the longest lasted 75 minutes) and included discussions on their personal experiences relating to international co-productions.

Issues concerning the role of audiences, cultural and linguistic proximity (Straubhaar, 1991; La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005), potential tensions due to power differentials or diverging interests (Baltruschat, 2010; Kuipers, 2011; Szczepanik, 2018b), cultural differences between partners (McFadyen, Hoskins & Finn, 1998) and the role of national funds (Hammert-Jamart, 2018) were some of the main concepts that guided the interview.

The first part of the interview was aimed at understanding the processes of an international co-production and the motivations and reasons of why co-producers produce internationally. Additionally, they were aimed at identifying the significance of factors such as cultural proximity, language, the reputation of producers, personal relationships as well as national funds and their regulations. Additionally, questions concerning their experiences regarding national differences between producers were asked. Furthermore, to identify the role of audiences during the

development phase, the topic list addressed questions concerning their definition and how much they influence the topics and subjects that are portrayed. Moreover, the interviewees were asked what genres, topics, and narratives they think are especially suitable for international co-productions. For the full topic list, please see Appendix B.

3.4. Data Analysis

The interviews were analysed by means of a thematic analysis, a method that is particular useful for identifying any recurring themes, patterns and/or ideas within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method is also quite flexible as it allows various phases of recoding and adjusting codes. The analysis followed the three principles outlined by Boeije (2010): constant comparison, analytical induction and theoretical sensitivity. The analysis itself was guided by four sensitizing concepts with a focus on emerging themes concerning cultural differences during the development and production phase, the idea of a national vs an international audience, cultural proximity, 'global' and universal topics, and finally the possible tension relating to power relations.

The interviews took place in April and May 2021 and were spread across a few weeks, which is why I decided to start the analysis while I still had to conduct two more interviews. This flexible process proved especially useful because I was able to use some insights and ideas I gathered from the initial analysis in the following interviews. This also meant that I slightly adjusted the topic list after each interview. With this iterative approach, I was also able to refer to some previously mentioned ideas and insights and follow up on those in later interviews. Once I've finished each interview, I started transcribing them so that I could add any relevant information and/or general remarks about the interview. For the data analysis and the coding I used Atlas.ti.

The data analysis was structured into two parts and followed an iterative and flexible approach. The first round of analysis focused mostly on what was said and the content of the interviews, paying particular attention to the most relevant information regarding the theoretical concepts and my two sub-questions. During the second round of analysis, I focused more on how the participants talked about certain aspects of international co-productions in order to be able to pick up on any emotional cues or subjective interpretations. By separating these two I wanted to ensure that I would not miss out on any relevant aspects that would help answer the research question.

For the data analysis, I followed the structure suggested by Boeije (2010) and Braun and Clarke (2006). They both propose using a step-by-step approach to ensure that all relevant data is coded and eventually analysed. Following the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), I firstly familiarised myself with the data set by reading the transcripts of the interviews multiple times before starting to add initial open codes. In the subsequent stage I focused on searching for central

and interrelated themes and patterns across the open codes, a phase that Boeije (2010) identifies as axial coding. I ended up having a lot of open codes, which is why it took some time to figure out the most relevant and central codes that would eventually help answer my research question. This initial phase of the analysis was also guided by my sensitizing concepts mentioned earlier. The final phase consisted of selective coding (Boejie, 2010) and focused on searching and identifying the final themes relevant to the respective sections in my results chapter (see Appendix C for coding tree). Some of the initial codes (streaming services, ways to enhance international success) proved to be not as relevant for answering the research question, whereas others were of great importance for the final results (importance of money, role of audience, cultural differences, national funds…) Finally, I focused on reviewing the initial themes by rereading the transcripts to ensure that all the codes fit into a category and did not overlap. Following this, I discussed each of the themes in the subsequent results section before moving to the final stage of writing up the conclusion that also includes a discussion of the findings of this study in light of already existing research and theory.

4. Results

The following chapter will discuss the results of the analysis and relate the findings to the theory discussed earlier. The aim of this research is to understand how international co-productions are organised and identify how much certain aspects discussed in the theoretical framework (national funds, audience, national differences, cultural proximity) guide the decision-making of European co-producers in the development phase of an international co-production. The results section is structured according to the sub-questions of this research. The first part is concerned with the decision-making of European co–producers and discusses their motivations and reasons of entering into international co-productions as well as the reasoning that influences the selection process of co-producing partners. The second part of this results section is concerned with the collaboration during the development phase itself and discusses four themes that consequently impact the partnership, the production, and the content of an internationally co-produced project. This section firstly explores the characteristics of the transnational partnership, secondly it discusses the role of public funds, thirdly it considers the role of audiences during this phase and lastly it explains how international co-productions impact the storytelling and the content of the final output. The last part of the results chapter is concerned with the challenges related to cultural differences that can arise during the production.

Before elaborating on the results concerning the research questions, I would like to shortly provide an overview of how international co-productions develop, including the processes that are involved. Before being able to rework/develop the script, producers need to find partners and/or projects that they would want to co-produce. Here it is useful to differentiate between finding potential partners for one's own initiated projects and finding projects from other producers that one would like to co-produce. According to participant B, there are three ways of how this process takes place. Firstly, the traditional way is by taking part in co-production markets that take place during film festivals (Cannes, Rotterdam, Berlin…) to which you get invited to which established producer get invited to. Prior to the festivals, producers receive a catalogue with projects that are presented so that they can arrange an appointment with the co-producers of the projects that they are interested in. The second way is doing this process online, which has been the case in the past year due to the global pandemic. The third way is based on existing contacts. If producers have worked in the industry for a long time, they have an established network of contacts across Europe, which often results in producers asking other producers directly.

The second stage, the development phase, involves a close collaboration that focuses on finding the budget (e.g., submitting the project to various funds, searching for international

distributors…) finding the cast, setting up the crew (deciding on head of departments…) and the reworking of the script. This phase can often last many years.

The third and fourth stage of the collaboration include the production (film shoot and post-production) and the distribution of the film. This research is less concerned with these phases as the focus lies on the development of co-produced projects.

4.1. Motivations of Doing an International Co-production

The first part of the results chapter is concerned with the reasons of why international co-productions take place and the motivations of the specific group of producers that was studied for this research. The analysis revealed two patterns concerning the reasons of why producers choose to co-produce internationally over producing nationally. The first motivation is related to financial considerations, whereas the second motivation refers to the other benefits of international co-productions.

4.1.1. Financial reasoning

The most frequent response to the question of why producers decide to co-produce internationally, was linked to finances. If it weren't for money-related reasons, international co-productions would not exist to the extent that they currently do. Especially the European film industry is built on a co-production system due to the national and regional support by funds as well as the funding schemes by the European Union. The financial motivation is especially true for smaller countries that don't have a big national film industry as they rely on international co-productions to be able to finance their films. Whereas bigger European countries, like France or Germany, are able to finance their films without the help of public funds, smaller countries like Luxembourg are dependent on co-producing internationally. In the case of Luxembourg, there is no other form of financing available that would allow films to be financed by other sources (e.g., no public broadcasting…):

"I think 90% of the reason why you are doing a co-production is because of finances. If you have a project that costs 10 million, you just know that you would never be able to get those 10 million only nationally and that's when you go out and do co-productions […] If it weren't for the money, I think 90% or 95% of co-productions would not exist." (Participant C)

"Well, the main reason is because of finances. If the financing in your own country doesn't suffice then you'll have to try finding international partners so that you can finance the project together." (Participant A)

"Here in Europe, the financing of films is for the most part built on co-productions. The bigger countries, like Germany and France, can finance their films in-house but most countries need co-productions to be able to close the financing on their films. And this is especially true for us in Luxembourg." (Participant D)

4.1.2. Other benefits and drawbacks of international co-productions

Besides financial motivations, international co-productions include many benefits that can stimulate producers to produce internationally. Whereas Luxembourg's film industry is reliant on co-productions, countries with larger national industries have to or can make the decision between co-producing internationally or nationally. This section therefore explores the advantages and disadvantages of international co-productions that emerged from the analysis.

Firstly, participants have stressed that with international co-productions they are able to share the financial risks and the overall workload (working on script, finding cast and crew, finding budget…). This seems to be one of the most relevant benefits that stands out. Additionally, other advantages that have been highlighted include being able to change partners with each project, taking a great deal of decisions regarding the creative elements together and the ability to broaden one's horizon and personally learn from other professionals who have different cultural backgrounds and/or working approaches:

"The great thing is that I'm always able to learn from a co-production… that I'm always taking something away from the other co-production country… whether that is that the producer in that country has more drive or dares to take a step that I would think about doing twice or where others would probably say, I'm glad I actually checked and discussed this again with my co-producer… So, I guess it's about taking the risk together and not being left on your own…" (Participant A)

"Well, the exchange, the input, perhaps the different perspective on things… And I think complementing and stimulating each other throughout the whole collaboration. From the development of the project up until the end…. but also during the production of the film, crew members really appreciate being able to work internationally because they receive input from others and get to know different approaches as well." (Participant E)

Besides the benefits relating to the collaboration, participants have also highlighted advantages that directly affect the final output and the creative aspects of the production. This

includes receiving input and sharing creative ideas to create the best possible version of the project. Additionally, compared to productions that remain national, international co-productions greatly facilitate the distribution of the film across multiple territories:

> *"You have more chances for an international distribution… One of our co-producers for example, because I told him if he wants to co-produce with Luxembourg it will be more expensive, and he said yes, but otherwise we'll remain in our comfort zone, and if we have you on board, we know you are thinking more international… and when you have a look over the script and tell us what doesn't make sense or is not understandable, then we'll be more likely to eventually have a bigger distribution… And that is the European approach, but it's also more complicated." (Participant B)*

> *"It's much more difficult for national films to cross national borders. (…) That's one of the advantages of European co-productions, that they already automatically have other countries involved, which makes it a lot easier for them to get recognised internationally… Because if you have a co-production of three countries, the film will already be distributed in those three countries alone, which is of course great. A national production has to first cross the borders to get recognised outside." (Participant E)*

> *" It's about I would say feeling supported by your fellow producers, that you can share all the knowledge that you have and create the best possible team, story and structure for the film. That feeling of supporting each other, every person bringing in the best possible ideas... either it's about story or crew choices, cast choices, location, funding sources." (Participant F)*

In addition to the many advantages that international co-productions have, they also clearly have some drawbacks. Compared to national productions, international co-productions are expectedly more expensive given that they have to spend a considerable amount of money on travel, accommodation and coordination if the film is shot in multiple countries. Furthermore, the more countries are involved, the more likely the production receives financial support from the respective national funds which each have criteria that need to be met. This can result in having to film in a country purely because you need to spend some of your budget there instead of specific script-related reasons. Because of this and the overall fact that you generally travel a lot, international co-productions are not very environment-friendly, as highlighted by one participant:

30

"Also in terms of sustainability, a co-production is kind of crazy… because you can produce much greener if people live locally and don't have to travel far. Because once you're co-producing internationally, you constantly have to travel from A to B…" (Participant E)

"It's very expensive to co-produce. If you analyse the budget, lots of money is spent on co-producers' fees and travel, hotels, sometimes higher crew rates. And if you would just imagine that film to remain Dutch, […] and coming from a Dutch source, it would basically create much more production value and less practical hassle." (Participant F)

"…having to have shooting days in the respective locations also make co-productions a lot more expensive. Because you have to film for five days in Switzerland, even though it might not really make sense in terms of the script… and it would have been much easier to just film those five days in Germany where most of the production took place anyways and you wouldn't have to move the whole crew either." (Participant E)

Besides the higher costs and the issue of sustainability, another drawback that was mentioned was the loss of control. With national productions, producers can keep their language, don't have to translate the script and generally have fewer risks because the producers are familiar with the domestic public funds and their regulations. The fact that you often have to trust partners from abroad who you might not know very well has been mentioned by multiple interviewees. This can potentially lead to conflict further down the line if they have to finish a project even though co-producers don't get along or don't share the same vision for the project:

"… when you think that you found the right partner for a project intuitively but somewhere down the line you discover that it's the wrong choice. Wrong choice because the person and you just don't have a personal connection, you don't trust each other, or the person is basically not delivering what he promises. Or even worse if the person is making mistakes or being dishonest. And then you are usually in a stage where you cannot go back anymore. When you have to finish the project with that person, that's really hard." (Participant F)

To summarize, the findings suggest that there are two predominant reasons of why producers decide to do an international co-production. Firstly, it is because of financial motivations, which is especially true for smaller nations that are reliant on co-producing internationally due to a lack of financial support in their own country. The second motivation relates to benefits other than finances, including the sharing of risks and the workload, the sharing of creative ideas and

knowledge, receiving and giving creative input from outside perspectives, and because of the chance of a much wider distribution of the project.

The results therefore suggest that the motivations of doing international co-productions can greatly depend on producers' objective and their personal preference. Countries that have rather small national industries, like Luxembourg (and to an extent Switzerland and the Netherlands) are more dependent on doing international co-productions simply because of financial reasons. In contrast, larger countries have more flexibility and can for the most part base their decision on other benefits. The findings therefore suggest that international co-productions can occur because of personal preferences, because of script-related or creative reasons or simply because of convenience. It is up to the producers to recognize and weigh the respective advantages and disadvantages of international co-productions against one another.

The financial motivation, however, seems to be the key driver for most transnational collaborations. Particularly if the aim is to produce a high-quality project that requires an extensive budget, producers are most often inclined to seek international partners to finance such films. This finding goes along with Jones' (2016) discussion on the differing objectives of international co-productions as well as Hjort's (2009) findings on the different types of transnational productions.

Additionally, besides the higher costs and the fact that producers have to adapt to new partners with every new project, the benefits seem to outweigh the drawbacks. Being able to share the financial risk and the overall workload as well as the ability to receive creative input and bounce ideas off each other are some of the big advantages compared to producing without partners. Furthermore, given that international co-productions are usually more widely distributed compared to national productions as found by Drake (2018), has been found to be one of the great benefits of co-producing internationally.

4.2. Selection of Partners

Once producers have made the decision to co-produce with international partners, they need to look for co-producers (for their own projects) or select potential partners (for projects initiated by others). Regarding this selection process, the analysis revealed four interrelating factors that emerged from the data: script-related and/or creative reasons, financial reasons and national policies, personal reasons and relations as well as reasons related to cultural proximity.

4.2.1. Script-related and creative reasons

Unsurprisingly, the first and probably most important aspect that guides the decision-making in this phase is the script of the project. Producers firstly analyse the story to identify specific locations,

technologies or other creative aspects that are relevant to the narrative and would push the selection towards particular countries. Where does the narrative take place? Does it need any specific technologies that are only available in some countries? Are there any distinct filming locations that are crucial to the story? This shows that the location of the narrative has a great influence on the decision of which country to collaborate with. If, for example, a great deal of the story takes place in one location that can be shot in a studio, the script is not as dependent on specific locations. If the narrative, however, takes place in a desert, in the Alps or in Berlin, it clearly drives the choice of potential partners into a certain direction. Often international co-productions therefore develop naturally because of story elements that push producers towards specific countries. This means that, in an initial stage, producers analyse what setup makes the most sense in terms of the narrative:

> *"… you first look at the story. What makes the most sense for the production? But that really changes with every project." (Participant D)*

> *"I think it always makes sense to look at the content. Where does the film take place? What kind of cast are you looking for? And can you cater to all the countries, or would the coproduction have to be set up artificially? Because when we co-produce, we have to spend some money in every country as well" (Participant E)*

If the director or the scriptwriter is, for example, looking for an American look for their film, producers often tend to co-produce with Canada as it has similar looking locations and it is, because of official treaties between Canada and Europe, much easier to co-produce with compared to the US.

Additionally, if a co-production with a specific country doesn't work out or falls through, there is sometimes a need to adapt or change the script slightly to be able to film in other locations as well. This is however a delicate matter because these changes might actually affect the project in a negative way. One interviewee has stressed that it is a fine line between adapting the script to make it work or better without risking drastic changes that would eventually harm the project and lead to what is known as 'Europudding':

> *"… if there is a certain story element in the script that would determine to go to Canada, for example, but that kind of project would never be financed in Canada, then the content is pushing me in the wrong direction. So then I would either change the country or change the project in such a way that it becomes suitable for a Canadian partner to be involved […]* and

the delicacy is that you change it and not harm it by changing it. Because we all probably

know the word Europudding […] assembling an international cast from seven countries that

all speak English, but no one is actually English. That's the kind of thing you shouldn't do."

(Participant F)

4.2.2. Financial reasons and national policies

The second factor that guides the decision-making in this process is financially motivated. Over the years, a lot of countries have introduced subsidies, tariffs and tax credits that are supposed to encourage film shoots taking place in their countries with the intent of supporting the local film industry. This has offered producers a lot more flexibility in terms of where they can film or with which country to co-produce with because they are guaranteed to receive some of the money that they spend in that location back from the national governments. The results clearly suggest that producers are very pragmatic and strategic about who to co-produce with. The interviewees have also emphasised that once all the script-related elements have been checked, it often remains a simple calculation and a question of where you can get the best value for your money that determines with which country to co-produce with:

> *"At the end of the day it is usually always a financial decision and a simple calculation. If, for*
> *example, I'm going to a studio in Hungary, the local technicians are cheaper, but I need flight*
> *tickets… and I know that their country has 20% tax shelter, so I would get 20% of what I'm*
> *spending there back from the government… But then I also know when I'm going to Belgium,*
> *I don't need flight tickets, the people already know each other, and I would get 40% tax*
> *shelter… but the technicians are also more expensive there…" (Participant C)*

> *"If I know, I have a story that only takes place in a studio which I can film anywhere in the*
> *world, then I will, of course, go to the country that gives me the best value for the money"*
> *(Participant C)*

> *"… then the next step, obviously, can this person find money in his or her country? And that is*
> *very much related to the guidelines or the policies of the respective funds or broadcasters."*
> *(Participant F)*

As already suggested here, closely linked to finances are the policies and criteria of the respective national funds. Because you only receive the funding if you meet their criteria, this aspect also clearly plays a role in the decision-making of producers at this stage. The analysis revealed that

the interviewees are very aware of the several guidelines of public funds across Europe. Two participants have, for example, highlighted Germany as an example to emphasize how much national funds can play a role in the financing process and consequently their decision of potential co-producing partners:

> "Generally, you always have the problem that you have a lot of funds, Germany, France, Belgium, that say we'll give you 500'000 euro if you spend a million here… Or in Germany, for example, you have a lot of funds that want 300% which means that you have to spend 1,5 million to receive 500'000 euro from them… One often talks about 'free' money here, money that you can spend wherever you want. And you need a lot of that to be able to even get your project financed in the first place… Because even if you have enough funds giving you the money, but you're not actually able to meet their criteria because you simply don't have enough money that can be spent in that country…" (Participant C)

> "In Germany, if you get a million, you have to spend 250% of that […] so 2,5 million that you need to spend there. They really profit by it…" (Participant B)

Besides the fact that you need to spend a certain amount of your budget in the participant countries, the results also imply that producers keep the criteria of their own national funds in the back of their minds when considering potential projects. Questions of whether the project is good enough or the script written in such a way that would allow it to be supported by the funds are influencing producers' final decisions:

> "The second criterion is, is the project of high quality? What do the other films of that director look like? Do, we, firstly consider the quality good enough and secondly would our national funds find them good enough…? (Participant B)

> "I think it's actually difficult to get the support of funds if they don't feel like there's some additional value to the co-production other than money." (Participant E)

4.2.3. Personal reasons and personal relations

The third factor that plays a role in the selection process are personal reasons and personal relationships. Given that filmmaking is a risky business that involves a lot of financial risks, most participants have stressed that the projects they choose (and consequently the partners) need to be important enough for them to want to invest a significant amount of money and time into the

project. One interviewee, for example, explained that one of their criteria is to see whether the project fits with the reputation and name of their production company. Additionally, personal reasons such as supporting equal rights and gender diversity by predominately investing into projects made by women, as noted by one participant, can influence the decisions regarding the partners and projects. One of the big advantages of the European funding system is that producers are able to choose quality over commercial-oriented projects:

"We first look at the story, if we like the story then we don't care about the genre… but I have to say that that's really a luxury that we have within the European system because we get a lot of national and regional support… if you have to finance everything upfront, you'll probably have to think much more commercially from the start." (Participant D)

"The first criterion is purely artistic. Is it right for us? Is it a project we would want to take risks for?" (Participant B)

Similar to personal reasons, existing relationships can also influence the decisions of producers. All participants have emphasized the importance of networking in the business and the therein resulting relationships that develop across Europe. This is also where the various workshops and initiatives introduced by the EU prove to be very useful because it provides a platform for professionals to get to know other producers, exchange advice and opinions, expand their network or receive general information about other countries. Especially if they have worked in the industry for a while, they automatically have a lot of contacts which can be very valuable if producers are looking for specific locations or other specific creative elements across Europe. Furthermore, if they have previously worked with some co-producers and the collaboration was successful, it makes it much easier to agree on another production because they already know that the partnership has worked and are aware of possible differences. Consequently, international co-productions often develop organically because of personal relationships:

"And I think many times with feature films, what you actually analyse is, of course, which producer would like this project? Is it someone you already know? Yeah, that's a matter of knowing the person, knowing the company and just intuitively thinking, okay, this person would like this project..." (Participant F)

"Either it's with people that we already know through other people that we have worked with before, or it's because they have a great reputation and then you just know that you can collaborate with those people." (Participant D)

"It's a big advantage when you've already produced something together because you can just say it's the same contract as last time and you already know the points of conflict […] If you are working with someone new then it's usually a longer discussion…" (Participant A)

"All these [European initiatives] are super important for a European network. And we really need them because that's how you make contacts and reach other producers. If, for example, I need a coproduction with Denmark, or we are filming in Denmark and I need some information… All of this is only possible because of a network that you have been building over the last years… because of these workshops and schemes that are financed by the EU" (Participant E)

4.2.4. Reasons related to cultural and linguistic proximity

Finally, the last reason that emerged from the analysis is linked to the idea of cultural proximity. Before agreeing to a co-production, producers often want to ensure that the systems between the countries are compatible. Even though, there is a clear intention of universalizing and standardizing the systems across Europe to facilitate the process of international co-productions, there still exist noticeable differences that can have eventually impact the production itself. This aspect will be further discussed in the last section of this chapter. Given that these differences exist, multiple interviewees have highlighted that it is, of course, easier to work with countries that share a language and/or a similar system. Nonetheless, the nationality of the filmmakers generally doesn't play a big role regarding the selection of co-producers and/or projects:

"Of course, you are choosing solutions that have already proved to work once before. And, of course, you're also considering whether the systems are compatible. For example, let's say Austria and Germany have a compatible system… but if you have an Austrian-German or a French-Belgian co-production, that's completely different compared to having a co-production between China and France, for example… I would say if you are stepping into a completely different culture, then a co-production is something entirely different." (Participant A)

"Countries with which we have tried doing something together are the Scandinavian countries, but they are so connected to each other and work among themselves that they don't really go out of that…. It's more about systems that aren't really compatible, where you just have to wait for a specific project for it to work." (Participant C)

Interestingly, one participant has highlighted that, international co-productions that would per definition be considered as one, do not actually feel like one on a personal level because it is such a common partnership:

"… co-producing with Belgium is actually so common that I hardly see it as a foreign co-production anymore. Luxembourg is a very natural and regular partner as well. […], partly because we share the language. Although that totally doesn't mean that we share the culture. Because culturally, I would almost say we're even more different than with other countries. But Belgium is so close […] and [it] is just the most logical partner to go to because you can easily split up the co-production between the two countries. It's close, it's like two or three hours in the car, we speak the same language... And although, culturally we are quite different, then again, we are also quite the same, so it's actually quite easy, just easy-going." (Participant F)

To conclude, the results suggest that the decisions in this stage are influenced by four interrelated reasons. The first and probably most important factor regarding the selection of partners is the script and the storyline. If a film takes place in a specific location, it clearly already pushes the decision towards specific countries. The second most important factor in this stage is related to financial aspects and the respective national guidelines and policies of the countries. Once all script-related reasons have been checked, it is generally always finances that drive the decision-making and determine the selection of the projects and/or co-producers. The third and fourth factors are somewhat minor and less important aspects compared to the first two. They are related to personal reasons and existing relations between co-producers and the sharing of a similar working system as well as similar linguistic and cultural characteristics. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that the selection of potential co-producing partners is often based on an interplay of all four reasons discussed here.

These results are in line with the theory discussed earlier. As Bondebjerg (2016) and Baltruschat (2010) have noted, cultural proximity and a certain geographical and linguistic closeness to other countries is certainly a factor that plays a role regarding the production and distribution of media products in a transnational network. However, the results of this research also show that,

even though similar linguistic and cultural characteristics between countries seem to be a benefit as it facilitates production and avoids problems due to different systems or communication, it is not a factor that seems to dominate the decision-making. Similarly, the nationality of the partners also doesn't seem to be as relevant. Instead, what does emerge from the results is that the national policies of the respective funds of participating countries actually play a rather big role in the selection of co-producers. This links back to what Tinic (2003) has discussed, namely that international co-productions are dependent on the corresponding regulatory environments of the participating countries rather than on cultural similarities.

Generally, the findings suggest that all interviewees are very aware of the role of national funds and having to meet their respective criteria, which can be challenging if it is a multinational co-production. The next section further elaborates on the role of national funds and the impact they can have on the creative aspects of a production.

4.3.   Partnership During Development

During the analysis four themes have been found that concern the partnership and shape the development of an international co-production and its creative output. The first theme is concerned with the decision-making of co-producers during the collaboration itself. The second theme refers to the role of national funds and their influence on the creative aspects of the production. The third theme explores the role of audiences during the development phase and discusses their impact on the production and the content of the film. Finally, the fourth theme discusses how an international co-production influence the genres, the storytelling, the narratives, and the topics that are portrayed.

4.3.1. The collaboration

a) *Interpersonal skills and experience*

.

"I mean, it's a cliche, but it's a people's business" (Participant F)

This quote summarises the first theme as it is a defining feature of international co-productions. It highlights the importance of co-producers needing good interpersonal skills to be able to have a successful and long-lasting partnership that eventually results in a successful project. Especially with transnational media production that brings together partners with different cultural backgrounds, mindsets and working styles. This is also why it is important to know your co-producers prior to the collaboration to avoid potential conflicts and disagreements down the line.

As already mentioned in the first section, multiple participants have stressed that the essence of a co-production is the fact that it can strongly benefit from different perspectives and insights. Being aware of potential cultural differences and knowing that there will be ups and downs during the production seems to be a noteworthy quality that good co-producers should have. One participant has emphasised the significance of recognising that the partnership entails working with people from different cultures which can consequently influence the collaboration:

"The way I read a script that's coming from an Iranian filmmaker, I read it differently than when it's a Dutch story. Because I have already taken into account that the Iranian way of storytelling is different. So, I should never lay my Dutch culturally-biased way of storytelling upon that script. So, if I read a script that's coming from, for example, Iran and Afghanistan, I read it and I basically decide, do I like it? Am I involved emotionally? Do I understand it? Does my fund wish to support a project like this? And if it's all yes, then I would go for it and I hardly have ever made real fundamental scripting remarks on a project like that. Because I feel that's not for me to decide." (Participant F)

"It is always dependent on who we have as a director or scriptwriter because they all have their own personal style that you can't really change… You can't really tell someone who has a specific artistic style to change it to be more commercial… because that's maybe not their speciality…" (Participant B)

"… because in a co-production you, of course, have to think along with your partners and also tell them that, okay this is just how a co-production works and some things are just done differently in other countries… whether that is because the team is more expensive, that they earn less or have longer lunch breaks or because the distribution rights are just different…" (Participant A)

b) Close collaboration

The second characteristic of an international co-production is the close collaboration between co-producers throughout the development stage. Multiple participants have highlighted the collaborative nature of co-productions. This includes being able to share the financial risks, helping each other and giving and receiving creative input. Even though the extent of the creative collaboration is always dependent on the individuals, most interviewees have emphasized that creative decisions are usually taken in accordance with all partners:

"What we do is, we read the script, we make notes, we talk to the director, we talk to the co-producers, we give each other ideas for casting if that hasn't been done yet, we help with the sales, setting up the distribution… you are really doing all of this together… that's why there are not really any discussions regarding the creative aspects." (Participant D)

"… It really depends on the constellation of the project. You have co-producers, who are more than happy to receive creative input, but you also have co-producers who kindly accept your suggestion but they wouldn't really go into it…" (Participant A)

"I tend to work very closely together with my co-producers, even though I don't think that is always the case. We also try to get the co-producers on board in the very early stages of the production so that they are already involved in the development of the script and can clearly state their opinions." (Participant E)

Nonetheless, despite most participants highlighting that a lot of decisions are taken together, it can also prove useful to have one producer in charge, who has the full overview of the whole production (usually the delegate producer). This is also where the importance of contracts becomes evident because they clearly state each co-producer's obligations. Generally, the more responsibilities and risks producers carry, the more of a say they have regarding the final creative decisions. Furthermore, if one producer takes the lead, it can avoid potential conflicts due to differing mindsets and mentalities further down the line:

"I believe the main producer needs to have a clear strategy and needs to be convincing in that, this is the route you should follow and then propose that to the co-producer in a fair and open exchange of thoughts. But if you as a main producer come up with three strategies […] then it becomes like ungraspable and vague and you might be coming into a situation in which there are two or three captains on the ship… or no captain on the ship." (Participant F)

This comment is reflective of Szczepanik's (2018b) remarks, namely that if too many countries are involved, the creative focus of the production and the primary responsibility of a producer can get lost. Such productions can often end up being associated with "Europudding" in audience reception.

In sum, the close collaboration is a defining feature of international co-productions. Despite professionals coming together from different nations and cultural backgrounds, this doesn't seem to affect the production and the final output to a great extent. Tensions due to different mindsets or

working styles which would impact the production negatively don't seem to be a common occurrence, also because potential differences or diverging interests are analysed prior to the selection of partners as discussed earlier. By having the responsibilities and obligations clearly stated on signed contracts and by making sure to choose partners that share similar visions, possible tensions are most often kept to a minimum. Filmmaking consists of teamwork as there is a clear effort of co-producers to collaboratively take decisions during the development of an international co-production.

International co-productions are characterised by a close collaboration between the participants and therefore require open-minded professionals who are skilled in dealing with people in order to overcome tensions related to national differences or diverging mentalities. Being mindful and accepting of these differences is an important asset that co-producers should have in order to be able to navigate through an international co-production. Having an understanding of your fellow partners, filmmakers, crew members and your target audience is therefore highly relevant and essential to a successful transnational partnership.

4.3.2. The impact of national funds on the production

The second theme that emerged during the analysis which influences the partnership and the content concerns the role of national funds. As already noted earlier, because international co-productions are reliant on financial support by public funds, the impact that they can have on the production is evident. The findings suggest that they can greatly impact the decisions regarding the crew and the cast of a production but also in regard to the content and the narratives. Due to the dependence on financial support, producers have to make sure to meet the criteria and fulfil the regulations of all the respective funds. This can prove quite challenging if multiple countries are involved in the collaboration, which is also why co-producers require good organizational skills as it often involves a back and forth to ensure that all the criteria are met:

> *"It's more about figuring out how you can comply with all the criteria of the funds so that you can get money [...] "You only have certain number of positions on a film and every country wants to get something in return. This means a country that provides funding wants, for example, a minimum of four positions of head of departments on the project. And if you end up having ten countries but you don't have 40 of these positions, then you'll just have to find a way to make it work... It's really a constant back and forth to make sure everyone is happy..." (Participant C)*

"You have certain guidelines from the funds and if you promise them something, you, of course, have to adhere to some of those criteria as well. And the bigger the co-production, the more countries are involved, the more challenging this is […] you have to cater to all the nations which means that you have to spend a proportionate amount of the budget in the respective countries. And that is often the difficulty, that you have to juggle here a lot of the times. If, for example, I have a camerawoman from Germany and an editor from Austria, then I still need another head of department position who is from Switzerland…" (Participant E)

This already suggests that the crew and/or cast is often merely chosen because of someone's nationality rather than because of their talent. Given that the funds are so essential to the financing of the films, they also have considerable power over what kind of content is financed and consequently produced. This influence and their decision-making power have been criticized by some interviewees as potentially being too subjective and rather opportunistic. Some national criteria of the funds, such as gender diversity and/or having an established track record can strongly influence the decisions regarding the crew and cast of a film. These rather opportunistic criteria in turn influence what kind of projects get supported:

"It makes sense from a purely strategical point of view, but that choice, I feel, is really opportunistic. And what it does, it rules out many talented people that don't have that track record but should still actually have that support." (Participant F)

Despite the influence national funds have on what is being produced and the production in general, it is important to highlight that these decisions are only made by a few individuals in the respective selection committees of the funds. This means that national mindsets and preferences that might currently exist can easily change if there is a generational change in the selection committees. Furthermore, given that a lot of countries have both economic and cultural funds, the interests might be diverging as well. Whereas economic funds are rather focused on supporting their own national film industry by creating employment for local workers, cultural funds are rather interested in supporting projects that showcase and portray national culture to the outside world. This implies that each fund clearly has their own interests and objectives that eventually benefit their own national creative industries. Nonetheless, it seems that this is the case for all countries, which presents a challenge for co-producers as they need to find an appropriate balance for their projects. The findings also indicate that producers are very aware of the impact that the funds can have on productions and are rather critical of this type of influence.

The results are in line with Hammet-Jamart's (2018) findings. National policies can indeed greatly impact the decisions of European co-producers and the content. This influence is already evident with the selection of projects/co-producing partners and persists throughout the development phase regarding the choice of crew and cast. Projects that involve an actor from a specific country are more likely to get financed by that respective fund. The findings therefore suggest that national funds (even though this is clearly dependent on each fund and doesn't have anything to do with the country per se) have a lot of power in regard to what type of content is eventually produced.

4.3.3. The role of the audience

The third theme that emerged from the analysis regarding the partnership concerns the role of the audience. The results confirm that the audience plays a major role during the development phase. The analysis has, however, also shown that the extent of the audience's influence clearly depends on the overall objective of the production company and the goal of the project itself. Multiple participants have emphasized the importance of identifying the target audience prior to working on the script. If the aim is to get the film shown on festivals for reputation purposes, then producers have to make sure that the film will be liked and approved by festivals programmers. If the goal is, however, to get as many people as possible into national cinemas, then they have to ensure that the story is commercial enough so that it attracts a wide audience. It is, therefore, important to identify your objective and understand your target audience before you actually start writing or reworking the script:

> *"Right from the start you have the question of who your audience is…. And that's a question you need to be able to answer before you start writing the script" (Participant C).*

> *"I think it is about keeping the audience in mind throughout the production… Will you be able to reach them with what you have planned? Is it an art house film that is supposed to successfully run and get sold to worldwide festivals, but one that will therefore be less successful with the mainstream audience? Or is it a film you intend to establish successfully in your own country, that covers a national topic that is very interesting and exciting, so that it can become a national success?" (Participant E)*

> *"Obviously it plays a role, but I think it's which kind of content is it that we're talking about? I mean, if it's an art house film, an alternative film, then the audience is obviously less important because it's much more about the expression of that specific person. But still, for*

example, then it becomes really important which festival would be attracted to select that film. […]. And for alternative films, festivals are still the most important commercial criteria for a sales agent to sell them." (Participant F)

In terms of differentiating between an international and national audience, the results don't reveal any clear answers. Generally, producers always aim to produce content that reaches as many people as possible no matter their nationality. One of the participants has, for example, emphasized that it is not necessarily about reaching an international or national audience, but that they rather group the audience into specific target groups (is the film targeting women in their mid 40? Men over 30? Children?).

Nonetheless, having a national or international mindset in regard to reaching your audience is also dependent on the country's population size and their language. Given that smaller countries might lack a national audience that is profitable enough, local producers tend to have more of an international outlook compared to producers who are producing for a national audience. Because smaller countries have smaller populations and potentially also speak a language not spoken outside of the country, producing a film that is very specific to a national audience might therefore be difficult in terms of making profit:

"Of course, you are always trying to produce the film with an international mindset […] Luxembourg and other smaller countries are somewhat special because you won't be able to recoup the production budget in your own country because of the small populations, so that you automatically have to become international." (Participant A)

4.3.4. The impact of international co-productions on storytelling and the content

The analysis revealed that international co-productions shape the content, particularly the genres and the themes that are produced in various ways. Firstly, the analysis revealed that it is somewhat difficult to pinpoint one genre that works particularly well for international co-production as it is always dependent on the individual project. Nonetheless, multiple participants have noted that historical topics, auteur-driven cinema and children's films tend to work well for international co-productions, which is in line with the findings of Baltruschat (2003) and Kuipers and de Kloet (2009).

Furthermore, multiple participants have explained that they consider some topics to be too national or culturally specific for them to work in an international setting, compared to stories that are already internationally well-known (example of the children's film *Heidi*). That doesn't mean that it is impossible to produce very national-oriented topics in international co-productions, but it might

require a combination of a well-written script, an interesting and attention-grabbing cast and/or already well-known directors/producers to be part of the project:

> *"There are simply some topics that are so national that they can only really work in that country. If they are very successful, then it is likely that they can cross national borders and be distributed in other countries as well... And then you have topics, that are just very suitable [for an international co-production] because they are universal, because they are relevant worldwide or at least within Europe." (Participant E)*

Generally, the interviewees have stressed that to increase the likelihood of productions travelling across national borders, the projects should focus on universal stories that can be widely understood by a wide audience. It is however important to note that, as outlined earlier, changing the script or combining too many different writing styles might actually harm the project in the process and potentially lead to a production getting classified as 'Europudding' by critics. It is therefore a fine line between changing the script to make it more accessible to a wider, international audience and ensuring that the project doesn't lose its local authenticity. Having multiple partners that are involved in the development of a production can therefore lead to potential difficulties regarding the storytelling:

> *"I would say that storytelling is something very culturally biased and therefore connected to a country, to the people coming from the country [...] I think it's a mistake to think that you can make a good film in which you try to please or combine storytelling from different cultures and different countries. I mean, there are exceptions to the rule, but generally..." (Participant F)*

> *"We are, of course, always trying to produce something that is internationally very artistic, but to also wangle the story in such a way that as many people as possible can watch it. That means we are always trying to keep the quality of that style but leave enough overtures so that enough people are able to understand, without pushing down the art itself." (Participant C)*

Furthermore, to increase the likelihood of a production crossing its national borders, one participant has explained that asking for feedback from international sellers on a script can be one way of ensuring that the project appeals to a wider audience:

"I strategized to get feedback on the script from several sales agents who know how they can best sell a film like this, internationally. [...]. And then they gave us specific feedback on how to make things clearer [...] And there's always a balance between how much of that are you going to present or push through to your director and writer and when that pushing through triggers resistance or makes the film worse..." (Participant F)

The results suggest that certain topics are particularly suitable for co-productions (stories that take place in multiple countries or that have connections in more than one country), whereas other topics are considered to be too culturally specific or too national to work outside of their national borders. Furthermore, the findings indicate that, whenever an international co-production is aiming to attract an international audience (which is dependent on the objective as discussed above), its content tends to lean towards universal and widely understandable stories. This does, to an extent, confirm the concerns of scholars that transnational media production can lead to a universalization of media texts and a lack of portrayals of local issues and topics (Baltruschat, 2003; Tinic, 2003; Kuipers, 2011).

Nonetheless, the results also indicate that culturally specific and very local topics can still be produced in international co-productions, the stories just need to be presented in such a way that they can be understood by a wide audience. This might present a challenge for creatives however as it requires a combination of a well-written script, an interesting cast and/or renowned directors/producers.

4.4. Challenges Encountered During the Production

The final section is concerned with challenges linked to cultural differences that can arise during the production of an internationally co-produced film. The analysis revealed two related aspects regarding national differences: different working systems between countries and tensions due to cultural differences between the filmmakers, technicians, and workers themselves.

As already mentioned earlier, the system of a country is one of the key factors when choosing co-producing partners because huge differences can create tensions. Considerable wage differences between workers can, for example, lead to potential tension on set, which producers would understandably want to avoid. Furthermore, different cultural backgrounds between workers, a different language and different working styles can also contribute to potential problems on set. Consequently, if the systems between the countries are significantly different, it can create problems that might be very subtle (different lunch times, working overtime, different mentalities but that can still have a considerable impact on the everyday life on set:

"It is more the systems that are different which can become problematic. For example, the way Germans or French work is different compared to Luxembourg. Luxembourg mostly uses an Anglo-Saxon working system. That means, for example, who is responsible that the camera vehicle is parked safely at the end of the day? In Luxembourg it's the direction, in Germany it's the production department and in Ireland it's the location department. And if you don't talk about this prior to the production, the car won't be taken care of at all because everyone assumes that the others are doing it. So it's more about the different systems…" (Participant C)

"You notice the differences in the smaller and subtle things. Maybe other countries have more of a laid-back approach compared to Switzerland for example. On the other hand, I think the Swiss are extremely efficient, organised and structured which might be something that we sometimes miss in co-productions with other countries." (Participant E)

Even though these differences exist, they usually don't have a significant impact on the production and the output itself. Furthermore, because of the increase in international co-productions, there is an effort to universalize systems to increase efficiency and avoid said problems during production. Moreover, even though English is usually the main language on a film set, this doesn't prevent all misunderstandings, simply because some terms might have different meanings in other countries. Additionally, participants have stressed the importance of talking and discussing these differences prior to the production to clarify everyone's responsibilities and obligations. Having an experienced line producer who knows how to approach an international film shoot and operate on a set with workers from different countries is therefore crucial to ensure a smooth production:

"I always try to bring people together prior to the production and say that they have to meet and decide on what system they want to work on. Because you really have to be clear about, okay I'm doing this, you are doing that… so I tend to always explain what kind of tasks I'm responsible for." (Participant A)

"I think as a producer, you make that decision when you hire the line producer, and when you hire the key head of department. Because already by choosing them I know, this person is a flexible person, willing to adapt, willing to explain things that they probably would not need to explain in Holland but do need to explain while shooting in Croatia." (Participant F)

The results show that cultural differences do exist and most evident during the film shoot of an international co-production because it brings together the workers, technicians, and actors from all the different countries. To avoid that national differences have a significant impact on the production, it is line producers who need to have good interpersonal skills and be experienced in order to guide the production as efficiently as possible with as little conflict as possible.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Answer to Research Questions

This research was guided by the following research question: *How do international co-productions shape the development and content of films?* which consisted of two sub questions. The first one was concerned with the influence of organisational factors and the decision-making of European co-producers, whilst the second one was aimed at understanding how co-producing internationally shapes the content, the storytelling and the creative elements of a film production.

This research provided an insight into the 'backstage' of international co-productions by shedding light on the decision-making processes of European co-producers that operate in smaller European nations (Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland). It has highlighted the relevance and significant impact of organisational, governmental, and regulatory factors that influence the transnational partnership itself as well as aspects concerning the final output of the production. The findings of this research suggest that the decision-making of co-producers during the development phase is shaped and influenced by a variety of factors, reasoning, and motivations. They suggest that it is often a combination of financial, creative, and personal reasons as well as regulatory and organizational influences that guide the decision-making of co-producers.

The influence of cultural policies and guidelines is not surprising considering that transnational media production is situated within national and international regulatory and organizational frameworks. Furthermore, the findings of this research highlight the existing tensions between structure and agency of the individual agents, a topic widely discussed in media studies (Havens & Lotz, 2009). While producers are required to work within a given regulatory framework that is tied to structural constraints and organizational and national cultures, they can still exercise their own agency. Even though a lot of decisions and behaviours of co-producers are driven and influenced by organizational factors (national, international, and supranational policies and regulations), the results clearly suggest that producers also base their decisions on creative aspects and personal reasons as well as reasons related to cultural and linguistic proximity.

Regarding the second sub-question, this research sheds light on how international co-productions influence the content of a co-produced film, including the storytelling, topics, genres as well as cast and crew. The organizational and structural influences are also evident here. The various criteria and guidelines of national funds that have to be fulfilled inevitably also impact decisions regarding the cast and crew of a production. The role of national funds is also evident in terms of the topics and genres that are produced as they eventually decide which projects get financial support.

Additionally, the more public funds producers have to cater to, the more likely it is that the storytelling is affected negatively, leading to 'unnatural' and 'Euro-pudding' co-productions.

Furthermore, the research confirms the focus on 'global' and universal stories in international co-productions discussed earlier (Baltruschat, 2003; Tinic, 2003). This emphasis on universal themes and stories doesn't however necessarily mean that the productions is lacking cultural specificity. On the contrary, often these universal stories are embedded in local and culturally specific settings and contexts. Additionally, with the rise of streaming services and VOD platform, media consumers have much easier access to films and TV shows that are concerned with very local issues and topics. Given their popularity, reading subtitles, and watching locally produced content has become much more common among today's media consumers.

5.2. Theoretical and Societal Implications

This research on international co-productions and European co-producers complements the existing studies on transnational media production and the studies that have focused on the macrolevel of media industries. While a lot of previous research on production studies have predominantly focused on single national settings, it is important to recognize the increasing importance and relevance of media production crossing national borders (Paterson et al., 2016). This research provides a starting point for further research on creative professionals that operate in transnational environments and the workings and processes of international co-productions.

Investigating the behind-the-scenes of transnational media production provides many important insights into how certain influences are affecting the production of media texts. This is important as it sheds light on the underlying mechanisms and structures that might not be evident at first hand. Considering the concerns of transnational media production raised by many scholars in regard to a potential lack of cultural specificity, cultural homogenization and standardisation in media texts, investigating media production remains an important area to study. It is relevant for both the creative professionals that operate in said industries but also for the society at large, bearing in mind the power and influence the media can have. By understanding what organisational factors influence and shape the processes of international co-productions and consequently the content of the production, producers and other professionals can act accordingly and improve the outcomes of everyone involved.

5.3. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

One of the weaknesses of the study is its relatively small sample size and the predominant focus on only one group of people. Increasing the sample size and expanding the research to include

other and/or a completely different group of creative professionals who are involved in international co-productions would therefore be a suggestion for future research. This could include above-the-line workers like scriptwriters or directors or below-the-line workers like technicians.

Another potential limitation of the study could be that there is a certain homogeneity across the interviewees. Especially because the data collection was mostly based on snowball sampling, the material might have a certain bias towards a specific point of view or perspective. However, I believe, because I predominantly interviewed producers that work in the Luxembourgish film industry, a certain homogeneity is to be expected because of the limited number of producers operating in Luxembourg.

Furthermore, given that this research has mostly focused on producers that work in Luxembourg (or have worked together with Luxembourgish producers on projects), it would be interesting to see what the results would look like with a focus on other nations. This would also allow for comparisons across countries in Europe, especially because smaller countries (Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium…) have a different perspective on international co-productions compared to bigger countries that have stronger national film industries (Germany, France, UK…). Furthermore, another recommendation is doing an ethnographic study that closely follows a specific project by observing the daily working life of a group of professionals during the development phase of an international co-production. This would offer another in-depth perspective on the various processes and potentially confirm or deny some of the findings of this study.

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Appendix

A. Overview of Participants

	Job title	Country they are currently working in	Gender	Years of working in industry	Years active in current production company
Participant A	Line Producer	Luxembourg	Male	Over 20 years	10 years
Participant B	Producer/Managing Director	Luxembourg	Female	Over 25 years	25-6 years
Participant C	Producer	Luxembourg	Male	Over 15 years	15 years
Participant D	Producer/Co-founder	Luxembourg	Female	Over 20 years	10-12 years
Participant E	Producer	Switzerland	Female	Over 18 years	8 years
Participant F	Producer/ Founder	Netherlands	Male	Over 25 years	24 years

B. Topic List

1. **Coming together (working together, cultural/national differences, national policies, national identity)**

- How do international co-productions start? How do they come together?
    - What elements play a role in deciding which project to go for?
        - Country, previous partners (trust), national funds and their criteria, the creatives that are involved, subjects, quality of script...
    - Would you say you prefer working with one country over the other or is it dependent on the project? Why or why not? (Cultural proximity; similar linguistic and cultural characteristics)

- How are decisions negotiated that eventually impact the creative output? (Casting, details in script...)
    - What factors play a role here? (Financial contribution, size of country, reputation...)

- Have you ever experienced national/cultural differences that might have had an impact on the production?
    - Amongst creative professionals? (Different ways of working, language on set, different national mindset of how you approach a production etc)
    - National authorities and governments (policies and/or regulations)?

- How does a national production differ from international co-productions? What are the benefits or challenges of each?

- To what degree do the policies and criteria of the national/regional funds play a role in the development phase?
    o How does it have an impact on the content?
- Would you say that there are national interests at play here? (Especially with regulations of some national funds)
- To what extent does the nationality of a film/filmmaker play a role?

2. Audience (Definition, Storytelling…)

- To what extent does the audience play a role in the development phase of an international co-production?
    o Who are you producing for? How would you define the audience of CP?
    o Would you say you have a national or international mindset?
    o How might this differ for local/national audiences?
- How much does the audience have an impact on the themes and issues the films are portraying?
    o Local vs international appeal
- Do you think there are some genres or stories that work particularly well for an international CP?
    o Are co-produced narratives very different from national narratives? Why or why not? (Cultural specificity vs universality)
    o Do you think that there are specific characteristics which make it easier to have global/international success?

3. European initiatives and European filmmaking

- How/To what extent have the workshops, programmes, funding schemes contributed to the development of international co-productions? (Objective of EU to foster European identity)

- Would you say that there is some kind of "European filmmaking" or "European identity?
    o Amongst European producers (or rather a national mindset)?
    o And related to content that is produced (transnational storytelling)

4. Reflection

- What are the most beneficial and rewarding aspects of international co-productions?
- What are the most challenging and frustrating aspects?

C. Coding Tree

- *If I know we will be doing a film that will only be shot in a studio, I will choose a country where I get the best value for the money…" (Participant C)*
- *"… then the next step, obviously, can this person find money in his or her country? And that is very much related to the guidelines or the policies of the respective funds or broadcasters." (Participant F)*
- *"I think it's actually difficult to get the support of funds if they don't feel like there's some additional value to the co-production other than money." (Participant E)*

➡ **Financial Reasons, National Policies**

- *"… you first look at the story. What makes the most sense for the production? But that really changes with every project." (Participant D)*
- *"I think it always makes sense to look at the content. Where does the film take place? What kind of cast are you looking for?..." (Participant E)*

➡ **Script-related and Creative Reasons**

- *"Of course, you are choosing solutions that have already proved to work once before. And, of course, you're also considering whether the systems are compatible…" (Participant A)*
- *"… co-producing with Belgium is actually so common that I hardly see it as a foreign co-production anymore. Luxembourg is a very natural and regular partner as well…" (Participant F)*

➡ **Reasons Linked to Cultural Proximity and Similar Systems**

- *"The first criterion is purely artistic. Is it right for us? Is it a project we would want to take risks for?" (Participant B)*
- *"Either it's with people that we already know through other people that we have worked with before, or it's because they have a great reputation… (Participant D)*

➡ **Personal Reasons, Relations**

→ **Selection of Partners: The Reasons**

- *"Except for maybe France, Germany or England, European cinema wouldn't really exist without all these national and regional funds…" (Participant D)*
- *"Well, the main reason is money related. When the funding in your own country doesn't suffice, you are trying to find international partners to get your project fully financed" (Participant A)*
- *"I think 90% of the reason why you are doing a co-production is because of finances" (Participant C)*

➡ **Financial Motivation**

- *"…you can keep your language; you don't have to translate the script and you have fewer risks because you know the funds in your country…" (Participant B)*
- *"It's much more difficult for national films to cross national borders. […] That's one of the advantages of European co-productions…" (Participant E)*
- *"The great thing is that I'm always able to learn from a co-production… that I'm always taking something away from the other co-production country…" (Participant A)*

➡ **Other Benefits of International Co-productions**

→ **Motivations of Doing International Co-productions**

- *"It is more the systems that are different which can become problematic. For example, the way Germans or French work is different compared to Luxembourg…" (Participant C)*

➡ **Due to Different Systems**

- *"In Belgium, people are more sensitive to hierarchy. As a culture, they are a bit, it's a cliche, but it's really true, …." (Participant F)*
- *"I always try to bring people together prior to the production and say that they have to meet and decide on what system they want to work on…." (Participant A)*

➡ **Due to different language, mindsets and cultural background**

→ **Challenges Encountered During Production on Set**

- "I mean, it's a cliche, but it's a people's business" (Participant F)
- "you have to think along with your partners and also tell them that, okay this is just how a co-production works, and some things are just done differently in other countries…" (Participant A)

→ **Interpersonal Skills, Experience**

- "I tend to work very closely together with my co-producers" (Participant E)
- "What we do is, we read the script, we make notes, we talk to the director, we talk to the co-producers, we give each other ideas for casting…." (Participant D)

→ **Creative Decision-making Together**

Creative Collaboration

- "It's more about figuring out how you can comply with all the criteria of the funds so that you can get money" (Participant C)
- "You have certain guidelines from the funds and if you promise them something, you, of course, have to adhere to some of those criteria as well…" (Participant E)

→ **Impact of National Funds on Cast, Crew, Output**

- "Right from the start you have the question of who your audience is…. And that's a question you need to be able to answer before you start writing the script" (Participant C)
- "Generally, I think it is about keeping the audience in mind throughout the production… Will you be able to reach them with what you have planned? (Participant E)

→ **Role of Audience**

- "There are simply some topics that are so national that they can only really work in that country […] And then you have topics, that are just very suitable [for an international co-production] because they are universal, because they are relevant…" (Participant E)
- "I would say that storytelling is something very culturally biased and therefore connected to a country…" (Participant F)

→ **Impact of International Co-productions on Storytelling**

Partnership During Development