Small places, universal stories. Diversity, film policy and the geographical dimension of filmmaking

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ABSTRACT

This article examines approaches to cultural diversity in a global- local axis. Can one talk about local cultural diversity in a film industry that is increasingly global? Cultural diversity is a goal in European film policy and an important rationale behind the support of European films. Geographical location is a key factor when discussing filmmaking because of the assumption that film and television production at different places represents diversity and therefore contributes to democracy and varied representations. Still, few studies examine whether filmmaking in the peripheries does, or can, contribute to diversity in film. Using Norway as a case, interviews with people in four companies located outside the capital were conducted to discuss diversity and the geographical dimension of filmmaking. The article argues that the companies contribute to diversity because of a commitment to shoot regionally, and because they use local film workers and talents. The companies act in a glocal context where they focus on the national and/or regional in order to get public funding, but projects that are too place- or cultural specific in content are usually not interesting to an international audience. They choose a hybridisation strategy, using local places to tell universal stories.

Keywords

Diversity | glocalisation | regional film | film policy | place

INTRODUCTION

Discussions of cultural diversity in film often address gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (Shohat, 2006; Ganti, 2002; Siapera, 2010). Although these studies afford important knowledge, there is little mention of geography in these debates. Except for the many discussions of American global dominance of the film industry, few studies examine whether filmmaking in the peripheries does, or can, contribute to diversity in film. One reason might be that most of the film

workers, film companies and institutions are located in the major cities, and so the companies in remote regions receive less attention. However, the amount of regional film funds in Europe is increasing (Newman-Baudais, 2011). In Sweden, for instance, most of the film production takes place outside the capital Stockholm (Dahlström and Hermelin, 2007).

Cultural diversity is the most important rationale behind the support of European films and European cultural policy is dedicated to the support of cultural diversity and the regional (Bondebjerg and Redvall, 2011: 22; McGonagle and Eijk, 2016). Following this, European film production relies on diversity as a justification for public funding. According to the report 'Regional and Local Broadcasting in Europe', published by the European Audiovisual Observatory, regional media has a closeness to people from the region in question that national and international media lack, and therefore has democratic significance (Brogi et al., 2016). It also argues that national media sometimes marginalises regional identities and languages and that regional media covers regional politics and issues that are underrepresented in national media. Therefore, regional media supplies communicative spaces that allow regional identities 'to be explored, developed, sustained and promoted' and facilitates intercultural dialogue (McGonagle and Eijk, 2016: 12).

According to Cine-Regio, a network of European regional film funds that promotes regional film production, 'diversity is the lifeblood of an art form. It is not just about equal opportunities for employment, it is about ensuring that film is a dynamic, representative and relevant means of expressing and sharing ideas across the spectrum of society' (Gubbins, 2016: 4). The idea behind public funding of the European film industry is that cultural diversity allows for the development of a distinctive European approach to film, in order to avoid American cultural imperialism since American films dominate the global market and national markets (Crane, 2014).

However, filmmaking as a unique cultural expression is under scrutiny. Can one talk about regional cultural diversity in a film industry that is increasingly global? Or could European films, due to runaway productions, travelling formats and co-productions, now be described as euro puddings more than films with any local or cultural specific treats? In addition, local investors' interest in regional film production is mostly based on the business potential and not the diversity aspects of filmmaking (Sand, 2018). The diversity concept is ambiguous. This article discusses its meaning and whether film companies that are located in the regions, outside the major cities, can contribute to diversity in today's globalized world. This is an important question since diversity works as a justification for public funding of regional film in Europe.

Thanks to its commitment to regional film, Norway represents a good case for studying regional cultural diversity in filmmaking. Interviews with people working in four Norwegian regional film companies are the main empirical source, and film policy documents represent an additional source. The concept

of diversity is central in Norwegian film policy. The government subsidises film production in the regions based on the premise that regional film should contribute to diversity; that Norwegian films should depict a variety of environments and geographical locations, diversity in stories, and in the use of people (Ministry of Culture 2015).

The article is composed in two sections. After a presentation of method, the relationship between cultural diversity, policy and UNESCO will be outlined. I will examine research and approaches to regional cultural diversity, perspectives that are relevant when discussing the geographical, local aspects of cultural diversity. In the second part of the article, I will use Norway as a case for discussing regional cultural diversity. It is argued that the filmmakers' dependence on public funding on the one side and their ambitions towards an international audience on the other represents a dilemma, and the companies often pursue universal and not regional, cultural specific stories.

METHOD

This article draws its data from a three-year PhD project, which aimed at examining the regional film- and television business in Norway. It was part of the international research project SiFTI (Success in the Film and Television Industries), which was supported by the Norwegian Research Council. The overarching goal of SiFTI was, based on case studies, to explore how actors in the business operate to survive and improve their competitiveness.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen employees in four companies in the offices of Original Film, Mer Film, Flimmer Film and Filmbin. The interviews were carried out in the period 2014-2017. Each interview was taped and transcribed, and analysed with a focus on diversity as a theme. The names of the interviewees are not anonymized, which they have all agreed upon. These interviewees are professionals and might have an agenda; after all, film policy in Norway is a topic of discussion within the film business, and it is important to place the statements. The two last film policy documents from 2007 and 2015 were used to see how policy emphasises diversity, and to place the companies within a film-political context.

Original Film, based in Tromsø, northern Norway, produces feature films, documentaries and shorts. Mer Film, which has an office in Bergen, western Norway, and in Tromsø, produces and distributes feature films. Flimmer Film in Bergen produces documentaries, shorts and commercials. Filmbin, located in Lillehammer, in central eastern part of Norway, produces feature films for children and youth, serves as a local facilitator for other film companies, and produces film courses for school children.

I selected these four companies because they have many years of experience—all have existed for more than seven years. The interviewees are what Bruun

describes as professional, exclusive informants with non-replaceable knowledge (Bruun, 2016). These companies were also able to provide interviewees who all worked fulltime, in contrast to those companies which have a single employee and which are often staffed by part-timers (Ryssevik et al., 2014). Geographical diversity was another important criterion, given the topic of this article. Tromsø and northern Norway were interesting because this region is furthest from Oslo, the hub of Norwegian film production. Bergen and western Norway represent the largest and most active film region in Norway after Oslo (Ryssevik and Vaage, 2011; Ryssevik et al., 2014). Lillehammer belongs to the inland region and, from a Norwegian perspective, is quite close to Oslo (190 km). Unlike western and northern Norway, the inland region is young in terms of film production, and Filmbin was one of the first film companies to establish itself there.

UNESCO, CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE RATIONALE BEHIND PUBLIC FUNDING IN EUROPE

Private film and television companies in Norway rely heavily on public funding, and it is an important premise for the very existence of film production in Norway, as it is in many European countries (Lange and Westcott, 2004:19). European public policies have paid particular interest to the film and television industries because of their role in identity- and nation building, because of visibility, branding and film-induced tourism, but also because of the domination of American films and television series (Higson, 2006; Bondebjerg and Redvall, 2015).

The diversity discussion in the Nordic countries stem from local cultural policy rationales such as "cultural democracy" and "culture for all" (Duelund, 2008). The idea behind cultural diversity is enshrined in the principles of UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, a binding international legal instrument adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on the 20th October 2005. Here, cultural diversity

> refers to the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression. These expressions are passed on within and among groups and societies. Cultural diversity is made manifest not only through the varied ways in which the cultural heritage of humanity is expressed, augmented and transmitted through the variety of cultural expressions, but also through diverse modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment, whatever the means and technologies used *(UNESCO, 2005: 4)*.

The Convention states that it is an objective to 'promote respect for the diversity of cultural expressions and raise awareness of its value at the local, national and international levels' (UNESCO, 2005: 3).

The 144 parties have a legal obligation under the UNESCO Convention to protect and promote a diversity of cultural expressions. France also introduced the 'cultural exception' concept in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

(GATT) negotiations with the United States in 1993. The intent was to treat culture differently from other commercial products, and to leave cultural goods and services out of international treaties and agreements (Lange and Westcott, 2004). According to Cine-Regio, 'Film and other creative industries have lobbied hard to ensure that cultural diversity is protected in free trade agreements, particularly with the US. In practice that means ensuring public support for culture is not subject to the same rules on free trade and competition as other areas of business' (Gubbins, 2016: 19).

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

APPROACHES TO REGIONAL CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Contemporary debates about cinema and cultural diversity involves a broad range of discussions. This includes the use of English language in non-Anglophone contexts (Kulyk, 2015), how European cinema interact with Hollywood (Elsaesser, 2005; 2015), authentic locations, globalisation of content and standardizations of formats, euro puddings and the erasure of national or local marks (Jäckel, 2015), just to mention a few of the topics. Andy Stirling has defined diversity as a combination of variety (number of categories), balance (whether each category is represented equally) and disparity (the degree of dissimilarity) (Stirling, 2007) and a Norwegian report about the regional film business see diversity in relation to geography, gender, target group, format and genre (Ryssevik, 2011). Cultural diversity is a political goal, but as Just (2009: 106) notes, there is 'neither a consensus on what constitutes plurality (e.g. is it a plurality of owners, a plurality of channels and titles and variations within them, or a diversity in content/ideas), nor on how this goal can adequately be achieved, let alone empirically measured.' Diversity is a messy concept, and the following section will shed light upon and discuss existing research and approaches to diversity that are relevant in a local-global context.

Essentialism and the burden of representation

As anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2007) points out, diversity usually brings positive associations. However, researchers have noted that diversity often is something that *the others* do (Henningsen et al., 2010).

For instance, the term 'regional film' does imply a difference from national film. Does diversity in geographical location result in different points of view and more varied films? It is a risk of essentialising those identities, and to forget the differences within a group or between individuals. How can we describe regionally produced films and television programs as 'regional'? These expectations of diversity can be described as the burden of representation (Siapera, 2010; Cottle, 2000). Media workers that are located outside the biggest cities become representatives of a group, of *regional* media workers, rather than media professionals. Even though film workers and film companies in the peripheries have diverse backgrounds, film policy expresses an expectation of diversity based on geographical location. If regional film workers are expected to express a 'regional' viewpoint, it can become limiting for them (Siapera, 2010). The relationship between policy framework and companies in the peripheries therefore involves a discussion of power and the autonomy to define the content in films, in other words, for instance whether regional film production should produce regional cultural specific content in order to get funding from regional film agencies.

The local and the global

Discussions of the global and local touch upon questions of media imperialism and homogenising of national and local culture, whether regional production companies produce something inherently different from big-city companies, and whether they have the autonomy to realise the advantages and opportunities of their geographical location.

The importance of place has gained significance not only in human geography but also in other fields as well, including film studies (Hallam and Roberts, 2013). This shift is due to globalisation and global flows of people, ideas and capital (Appadurai, 1996). According to Bjørkås (2002), three perspectives dominate research on the local and the global. The first view sees place and the local as less important because of globalisation—that is, Western and especially American culture has overwhelmed the world and resulted in cultural uniformity. A key fear about the globalisation of culture is that there is a growing homogeneity in cultural representations under the influence of profit-driven supranational corporations. One recurring theme in these discussions has been the threat posed by American popular culture to authentic national culture and identity. Elsaesser (2015: 21) argues that Europe no longer has a narrative of self-identity and self-creation, because the borders, distinct peoples, languages and territories of the nation-states have gradually lost their markers of identity, which differentiated one from the other. This perspective does not leave much hope for regional film and television as providers of diversity.

The second view claims that globalisation *promotes* diversity, because the flow of ideas and cultural openness inspire new creations and make different cultural expressions available to a larger audience. The third perspective involves

to see the local and the global as mutually influential: 'glocalization', Robertson (1995: 29) argues, 'captures the dynamics of the local in the global and the global in the local'. In this view, the local meets the global in a transnational context where new cultural forms develop. These processes could be described as hybridisation (1994), cultural translation which allows the periphery to appropriate global culture to express local culture.

In her article about Canadian regional cinema, Jäckel (2007: 42) asks, 'Can one talk in any meaningful way of regional identities when cultural hybridisation is everywhere?' Serra Tinic also addresses these questions in her book *On Location: Canada's Television Industry in a Global Market* (2005). Tinic looks at the ways in which regional producers navigate between the economic and aesthetic needs of a global media industry, political and economic limitations on a local and national level, and the nationalist cultural goals of Canadian broadcasting policy. Talking to television producers in Vancouver, she found that stories that were overtly place specific were difficult to pitch to international distributors. The larger the market, the more homogenous or universal the programme in question needed to be. Based on research in Latin America, Waisboard (2004: 370) concludes similarly: 'Content that is strongly embedded in local and national cultures has a better chance to be successful domestically, but it is less likely to find interested buyers and enthusiastic audiences abroad'.

Place and nationbuilding

Research that relates location to identity, authenticity, and sense of place or placelessness, is relevant when discussing the geographical dimension of diversity. Sörlin (1999) focuses on how articulations of landscapes shape national and regional images and identities and form the collective image of a country. In terms of the construction of a national film culture, it is necessary for both centre and peripheries to be aware of 'a plurality of overlapping and competing discourses within which individuals and groups identify themselves and others in different ways at different times' (McIntyre, 1985: 70). Thus, audio-visual representations are important in a nation-building context. Many European countries share a similar history of public television broadcasting with the nation specific ethos entailed both in the traditions of policy making and program production (Collins 1990; Schlesinger 1991). In other words, the public service broadcasters are expected to produce content that can be categorized as nationally specific.

The European Union's motto for media and film policy, 'unity in diversity', tries to capture the uniqueness of each country while at the same time embracing a common European culture. As Sassatelli (2015: 28) notes, it balances between competing narratives: How does one secure pluralism and cultural richness within a country and at the same time promote a common, if imagined community at the national level? After all, regional narratives are part of a national cinema, and the sum of these films constitute a common understanding of identity, values and images of ourselves.

In an article about regional film production centres in North America, Chris Lukinbeal discusses different types of locations and different uses of landscape in productions (2004). When the location used 'doubles' for another location, the place is 'placeless'. The landscape is space, and the production's emphasis is on narration and dialogue, not scenery. These kinds of productions are often 'economic runaways' that were moved to a cheaper place to film. A creative runaway allows the story to determine the production location, and, as a result, there is more geographic realism in the production (Lukinbeal, 2004: 309). Lukinbeal and Zimmermann (2006) also address what they describe as the 'crisis of representation' in the tension between the copy (or stand-in) and the original: 'Why bother with authenticity when people can travel to Las Vegas and praise the fake Venice or New York while pointing out that it's much better than the real place?' (Lukinbeal and Zimmermann, 2006: 322). Today, many countries, Norway included, offer tax incentives to attract international film productions. In Norway, one of the arguments behind the introduction of film tax incentives was that it would boost regional film production. However, these incentives are debated and critics claim it is a waste of scarce public resources (McDonald, 2011).

Diversity and the economic aspect of cultural production

Conflicts between culture and business within the cultural field is an age-old topic, but still relevant, also when discussing diversity. The field of cultural production is in tension produced by two opposing principles of legitimation: peer recognition and public recognition as expressed by sales and rating (Siapera, 2010: 83). The problem is, according to Bourdieu (1998; 1993) that the latter has come to dominate. As a result, issues pertaining to cultural diversity will only be covered insofar as they may lead to increased ratings or advertising income.

For instance, EU is one of the parties that have a legal obligation under the UNESCO Convention on the Protections and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. However, researchers have noted that the cultural dimension is now less important to EU policy, whereas the market side and an economic growth discourse are becoming more important (Crusafon, 2015). The public funding of the European audiovisual industry rests on an argument of diversity, but this industry is now increasingly expected to finance itself. Co-productions, transnational content, and international financing are ways in which companies deal with this challenge.

Since the business aspect of film is becoming more important, how success is calculated and measured is a crucial diversity issue. It is important to impress government and private investors, and demonstrate 'that film is an investment that brings tangible rewards in terms of jobs and GDP, rather than a spending burden' (Gubbins, 2016: 25). Research shows that the creative industries discourse, which emphasizes regional film production as a regional development tool, has had a major impact on European film policy (Sand, 2018; Newsinger,

2010). The development of the creative industries policies derived from a desire to boost local economies, and this policy discourse saw culture as a tool for commercial interests. The diversity argument is now less prevalent than the business argument and to make money on culture is a new policy mantra.

As this overview and discussion of approaches to regional cultural diversity reveal, diversity relates to the concept "regional" in terms of what it can or should be, including its role in nation- and identity building processes, and whether it makes sense to talk about authenticity and the place specific in a globalised world. Secondly, it shows how the creative industries discourse and commercial interests are becoming more apparent in cultural policy, reducing the impact of the cultural political argument behind diversity.

REGIONAL CULTURAL DIVERSITY: THE CASE OF NORWAY

Film production in Norway makes an interesting case for discussing regional cultural diversity since the government wants to strengthen national and regional film production and uses diversity as an argument. Norway also has a long history of strong regions and it has long remained an important policy goal to sustain and support a scattered population pattern, including opportunities for people to be culturally active where they live (Bakke, 2001).

Because American films dominate the market, and a liberalisation of trade in the audiovisual sector may decrease cultural diversity, the policy insists, 'audiovisual media plays an important social, cultural, democratic and political role. They are also carriers and conveys of a country's culture' (Ministry of Culture, 2007: 13-14).[1] In other words, films are important for the country's nation branding and visibility. The government sees domestic films as a counterweight to the cultural influence from American films. Norway also ratified the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity in 2007. The Minister of Culture and Church, Trond Giske, commented on the ratification in a press release and said that an active cultural policy, which secures diversity of expressions is, because of increased globalism, necessary in a country like Norway (Ministry of Culture and Church, 2006).[2]

Cultural diversity is connected to an emphasis on nationbuilding, which is an important argument behind the state's support of the national film business. The film policy of 2007 describes film as important because it reflects our history and presence. It also underlines film as a mediator of identity, belongingness and community, and the importance of Norwegian language, culture and storytelling in films (Ministry of Culture, 2007: 7). This is also emphasized in the new film policy, which was introduced in 2015 (Ministry of Culture, 2015). Here it says that knowledge about our common cultural heritage will strengthen our sense of identity and belongingness to society's different com-

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1.   All translations are the author´s.
2.   Until 2012, Norway had a state church.

munities, and that Norwegian films are important for 'our common Norwegian identity' (Ministry of Culture, 2015: 6). Film policy emphasizes film as a medium for establishing a feeling of nationhood and homogeneity.

In addition to a commitment to the national film business as a whole, *regional* cultural diversity is promoted within the country as a way of securing representation and democracy. Regional film was introduced as part of film policy in 2007 and diversity was one of the main arguments behind this commitment. The film policy of 2015, *En framtidsrettet filmpolitikk* [A provident film policy], showed that *varied* films of high quality is an important goal for the Norwegian film business as a whole. Geographical variety is obviously part of this commitment to diversity, and the policy also clearly stated that the government wanted to strengthen regional film. The overall aim of the public funding of regional film is to:

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

According to Vassenden and Bergsgard (2012), the concept of cultural diversity has gained increased importance within cultural policy. Earlier, cultural policy was more concerned about promoting a national culture and cultural homogeneity because of the impact from globalism, while it now increasingly emphasizes cultural diversity (Vassenden and Bergsgard, 2012). A policy document that was introduced in 2003, 'Kulturpolitikk fram mot 2014' ('Cultural policy towards 2014') also argues that cultural policy cannot be based on a homogenous understanding of culture, and that it needs to consider diversity (Ministry of Culture, 2003).

Diversity in a regional context means that Norwegian films should mirror the composed Norwegian society, and also reach different groups of audience and contribute to varied expressions and forms in film. Inherent in this argument is the expectation that regional film production should represent something different than the national film culture as a whole; that it should result in *other* film expressions, use of locations and people and, in all, more pluralism of Norwegian film. The film policy goals also imply an interest in democracy—people from different parts of the country should be represented and allowed a voice. For example, it has been said that film production in Norway is mostly an activity performed by young men from the capital of Oslo (Ministry of Culture, 2012). Summing up, the film policy both speaks of a common Norwegian identity, and hence, homogeneity, while at the same time it promotes regional diversity. As such, it resembles the EU motto "Unity in diversity", as it emphasises both the feeling of nationhood and the importance of geographical variety.

HOW REGIONAL FILMMAKERS IN NORWAY RELATE TO DIVERSITY

While diversity is difficult to measure and may be categorized in different ways, I will in the following relate to how the Norwegian government addresses the relationship between diversity and regional film in film policy documents and the expectations these documents put forward (Ministry of Culture, 2015; Ministry of Culture, 2007). According to the government's understanding of the concept, diversity in regional film includes 1); the use of people, 2); geography and use of locations, and 3); content (diversity in stories). After a presentation of how the four regional companies relate to these three categories, I will discuss what seems to be both a goal and a dilemma for regional film, namely how to tell universal stories from a local point of view.

Diversity in the use of people

Access to professional film workers is a challenge for film production in small places. The number of film workers and companies may be limited, which also affects the breadth and variety of competence. Even though all of the four companies emphasise the importance of choosing local people whenever possible, they sometimes have to hire film workers from Oslo or abroad, in order to get the specific competence that they need. However, due to their role as employers and active nurturers of the local film workers, these regional companies contribute to increase the amount of film workers outside of Oslo. As producer at Filmbin in Lillehammer, Trine Aadalen Lo notes, 'we try to use local film workers whenever we can. In the end, it will gain all of us, and it will strengthen the local film business.' In this sense, regionally based film companies represent access to people from different parts of the country and they function as a foot in the door for up-and-coming new talents who are located outside of Oslo. It is also an advantage for these companies to have access to local talents.

Diversity in locations

Director at Filmbin, Christian Lo, thinks it is important that film policy addresses the connection between film as a visual medium, and diverse filmic representations of Norway. He emphasizes the importance of film as a mediator of different landscapes, and questions how production companies that choose to do their productions abroad, can get funding from the Norwegian Film Institute. The film policy does not specifically point to visual representations of landscapes, but it clearly emphasizes that films should mirror the breadth and diversity in Norwegian society, and describe and interpret our culture (Ministry of Culture, 2015: 11).

According to Arefi (1999), one of the consequences of runaway productions is a standardization of landscapes, and the place becomes inauthentic, or 'fake'. Some companies choose to take their productions abroad because foreign subsidies, cheap labour, and other economic incentives bring production costs

down. There is an ongoing debate on whether this weakens the Norwegian film business. However, few studies discuss how these runaway productions affect the visual representations in films. Different nations have different national landscapes (Sörlin, 1999: 104), and film- and television production contributes to exhibiting, or excluding, these landscapes. By doing this, they take part in shaping the collective image and memory of a country.

Each of the four companies see their location and access to nature as a competitive advantage and a way of standing out, and therefore express a clearly outspoken commitment to shoot regionally. An examination of their productions also shows that they are for the most part shot in the regions (Sand, 2016). The commitment to shoot regionally gives the companies the possibility to use local film workers and therefore strengthen the local film business.

Diversity in stories

Does a geographically diversified production landscape add more diversified films to the national cinema? Film policy connects pluralism to the regional and there is an underlying expectation of regionalism, but do the companies pursue regional themes?

The companies emphasise that they want to tell universal stories from a local perspective, addressing themes that could be relevant to an audience beyond the national border. They see their location as a creative advantage since they have access to other stories than companies in Oslo. Producer Mona Steffensen explains that Original Film uses the scenery from northern Norway as a setting, but the stories should have a national or universal appeal. Flimmer Film wants their projects to get international distribution: 'If you want to sell something to the BBC, you need to make an international series. You don't come to them with a Norwegian series; they are not interested in that. It must have content that interests Englishmen' (managing director Thomas Lokøen, interview). Flimmer Film's documentary 'Ground hoppers' is an example of a universal story about two football supporters from the city of Bergen, western Norway, who want to visit every English stadium before they die. English football is an international phenomenon, which makes the documentary interesting not just for the Norwegian audience. Flimmer Film actively seeks to find what they describe as universal stories, as a strategy for achieving as wide circulation as possible for their productions. As Waisbord notes, 'Globalization has nurtured the formation of a cosmopolitan class of industry professionals who, from New York to New Delhi, increasingly share similar concepts and attitudes about 'what works' and 'what doesn't' in commercial television' (2004: 364).

An example of a universal story that successfully uses regional location and regional film workers is the feature film *Out of Nature* (Ole Giæver, 2014). The film won the Europa Cinemas Label as best European film in the Panorama section of the Berlin Film Festival in 2015. The production company is Mer Film (Bergen/Tromsø), the location is the city Mosjøen in northern Norway,

and the director, many of the actors and film crew are from the region. The theme of the story, however, is not local or regional specific. White, young man with wife and child struggles with his male role and meaning of life, then goes on a mountain trek and experiences a personal crisis. The city of Mosjøen and the surrounding mountains play an important part in the film. The main character is from northern Norway, and we see scenes from his childhood in northern Norway. These scenes function as a way of showing his urge for simplicity, a longing for something else, perhaps a different life. To some extent, the film is typical Norwegian, because of how nature works as an escape for Martin, the main character. Norwegians are known for having a self-image as a nature-loving people, and nature usually represents something positive in films, a site for leisure and contemplation (Iversen, 2016). As Bjerkeland (2018) argues, Norwegian regional films show an interest in nature, but the story represented in *Out of Nature* is not specifically regional.

DISCUSSION: HOW TO BE LOCAL, BUT UNIVERSAL

The findings show that all of the companies are dedicated in their selection of regional locations and people. Diversity in stories, however, is a complex theme and in the following, I will focus on why the companies prefer universal stories and the dilemmas it represents.

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

Flimmer Film producer Johnny Holmvåg says, 'we are trapped between the Norwegian television channels' need for Norwegian content and the international market's need for unique stories with universal themes' (interview). According to Holmvåg, then, the location can be local, but not the content. Holmvåg describes a dilemma: the project needs to focus on the national in order to get public funding, but projects that are too culture specific in content are usually not interesting to an international audience. A documentary that is, in their words, 'too Norwegian' will not succeed internationally. Paradoxically, Norwegian film policy asks that Norwegian films should succeed internationally but also pass the Culture test—that is, satisfy cultural criteria—when seeking funding at the NFI (2015). This is a challenge for companies in other countries as well—the result of an increasingly international industry where formats, programs and films travel across borders. International distribution is a way of making money for the companies, and it enhances the companies' reputation, which makes it easier to connect with co-producers abroad.

While the Culture test represents an idea of the national, it does not point to the heterogeneity within the nation. In addition, the regional film agencies in Norway do not prioritise regional content when they allocate and/or invest in film (Bjerkeland, 2018: 12). It is difficult to measure the extent or amount of regional content, and the regional agencies are more concerned about aspects that can be easily measured, such as the location of production companies, the use of personnel, and filming locations.

However, Flimmer Film acknowledges that regional companies are important to the public broadcasters NRK and TV2 because they represent access to stories, environments and people other than the companies in Oslo. NRK and TV2 are obliged to represent the whole country, and regional companies can satisfy these needs. In addition, the Norwegian film audience prefer films with a regional attachment, and films produced in a specific region often attract a large audience in the same region (Kalkvik and Risvik, 2006; Bjerkeland, 2018). Films with local attachments and a connection to specific geographical places have a tendency to succeed in those areas (Waisbord, 2004; Banerjee, 2002).

This regional taste for film appears to conflict with the desire to develop these films' international potential. Serra Tinic argues that 'culturally specific programs are negotiated within an arena of competing interests, including the perceived need to gain access to global markets, the political and economic limitations of federal cultural policies and funding practices, and national network programming structures' (Tinic, 2005: x). Waisboard (2004) finds that globalism has resulted in a standardisation of content in the television industries. This is why Flimmer Film developed the documentary series *Death*; everyone has a relation to death whether you live in Norway or India.

The place just becomes a setting, it could be anywhere in the world, because the story is familiar in a global perspective. In this scenario, regional films become local expressions of global phenomena (Mangset, 2002). As the interviewees also recognize, people want to see stories from where they live, stories that concern them. Erasing place and culture-specific features from these kinds of stories might also contribute to erasing people's place identity or sense of place (Agnew, 2014; Escobar, 2001). The findings show that regional film production involves a dialectic relationship between the local, the national and the international. The most important is that the content must be interesting to an international audience; the location can be a small place. The companies are located outside the capital, but have an international focus. For instance, Flimmer Film is based in Bergen, but categorises the company as an international television company, not a *regional* company.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the geographical dimension of diversity is important when discussing regional filmmaking because of the assumption that film and television production at different places represents variety and therefore contributes to democracy, varied representations and to the national cinema as a whole.

However, this article shows that the concept diversity has no clear definition. Theories of regional, cultural diversity show an expectation of regional film as something authentic and different, but research also reveals a devaluation of regional diversity, pointing at globalisation, cultural uniformity and hybridisation. It is important to be aware of how these different, and arguably incompatible, interpretations can affect policy and filmmakers. This is not only a 'regional' issue; it concerns the Norwegian film business, and the European film industry as a whole, especially at a time when American films and television programs continue to dominate the market.

The Norwegian government subsidises the national film business because it is an important cultural expression, and because it represents the *Norwegian* society—in other words, because Norwegian films are different from other places' films. This is also an important rationale behind the support of *regional* film, since regional film is understood to represent diversity. However, the analyses of existing research, Norwegian film policy and interviews with regional filmmakers indicate a contradiction between succeeding internationally and simultaneously fulfilling cultural specific tests in order to get public funding. The article demonstrates that the companies pursue universal stories and not regional specific themes. This is not surprising, taking into account that both government and companies want to succeed internationally, which is expressed in policy goals, and because international broadcasters and distributors want universal content that is interesting for a broad audience.

The companies act within local, national, and global frames, including production strategies that promote 'universal' themes but with a place or culturally specific touch (Sklan, 1996; Rao, 2010). All of the companies discussed here necessarily experience the dilemma of telling a universal story from a local point of view. Local affiliation or national-specific elements are important parts of applications for funding from regional film agencies and the NFI, but if one wants to interest international broadcasters and distributors, the project must also be relevant to an international audience. To achieve their creative ambitions, the regional film companies and film workers need to navigate between national application schemes, which promote national themes, regional investors, which emphasise the business and moneymaking aspect of filmmaking, regional film agencies that demand local affiliation, and international distributors, who have an interest in universal content that can reach an international audience.

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