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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Hanzlik, J. (2020). Czech Film Policy after 1989: Between Neoliberal and National Mercantilist Discourse. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, *20*(3), 399-417. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-71034-9

Czech Film Policy After 1989: Between Neoliberal and National Mercantilist Discourse*

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Abstract

After 1989, the Czech film industry underwent a transformation from an integrated state-funded monopoly to numerous largely privatized and disintegrated film institutions and activities that had to struggle for their existence in the new capitalist economy. The change was accompanied by debates regarding the state funding of cinema, which developed from early naïve neoliberal discourse through struggles for the internal stability of public financing of film to eventual endorsement of national mercantilist discourse that supports Czech national cinema's competitiveness on international markets. The analysis presented in the article and focused on recent discourse of Czech Film Fund revealed that current Czech film policy is largely in line with film policies of Western European countries. Yet, in contrast to non-post-socialist countries, it is conspicuously devoid of centre-left agenda in terms of equality and diversity on the labour market in the film industry. It also puts little emphasis on the reinforcement of social cohesion through cinema. As contemporary Czech society is becoming increasingly politically polarized, the accentuation of these issues could be beneficial for the state and its inhabitants for years to come.

Keywords: Czech cinema, film industry, film policy, film funding, post-socialism, neoliberalism, market competition.

Introduction

The transformation of the Czech film industry after 1989 involved various discussions regarding how the industry should be re-organized and financed and struggles accompanying the formation of adequate film policy. All segments of the value chain, from production through distribution to exhibition,

* This work was supported by the European Regional Development Fund project "Creativity and Adaptability as Conditions of the Success of Europe in an Interrelated World" (reg. no.: CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000734).

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were previously parts of a state monopoly[1] and in the 1990s undergoing significant organizational changes, and so was the financing of cinema from public resources. The enthusiasm about the new capitalist era and neoliberal ideology prevailed in the beginning: the nationalized industry was disintegrated and in large part privatized, even though, for example, some prominent voices unsuccessfully opposed the idea of privatization of Barrandov Studio (especially the filmmakers Ladislav Helge, Věra Chytilová, Pavel Kačírek, and Jiří Krejčík).[2] But an inadequately regulated and subsidized small Czech film industry did not prove to be sustainable for very long. Early film-related legislation soon became outdated, and discussions about its improvement ensued, with differing perspectives endorsed by politicians from the left and right side of the political spectrum, filmmakers, and other actors involved in the process.[3] The first part of this study summarizes the developments in the Czech film industry and film policies since 1989 based on existing literature. The second part subsequently explores in more detail recent discourse employed by the series of documents *Long-Term Strategy*[4] of the state-established Czech Film Fund (CFF), with particular focus on the means of addressing and legitimizing film financing provided by the state. Given that there are numerous

[1] Amateur cinema and Czechoslovak Army Film were independent of the rest of the infrastructure. Source: *50/1945 Sb. Dekret presidenta republiky ze dne 11. srpna 1945 o opatřeních v oblasti filmu*. Totalita.cz [Decree of the President of the Republic, 11 August 1945 on measures in the field of film], accessed August 19, 2020, http://www.totalita.cz/txt/txt_zakon_1945-050.pdf.

[2] Petr Bilík, "Small Country, Complex Film Policy: The Case of the Czech Film Funding System," in *Digital Peripheries: The Online Circulation of Audiovisual Content from the Small Market Perspective*, eds. Petr Szczepanik, Pavel Zahrádka, Jakub Macek, and Paul Stepan (Cham: Springer, 2020), 292, accessed August 11, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007%2F978-3-030-44850-9; Pavel Strnad, "Transformace Filmového studia Barrandov po roce 1989. Úvod k bloku rozhovorů," [Transformation of the Barrandov Film Studio after 1989. Introduction to the block of interviews] *Iluminace* 19, no. 1 (2007), 153; Vít Janeček, "K privatizaci české imaginace," [To privatize the Czech imagination] *Aktuálně*, November 24, 2013, accessed August 11, 2020, http://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/vit-janecek.php?itemid=21703.

[3] The most detailed account of these developments so far is given in František Pok, *Proces tvorby české audiovizuální legislativy po roce 1989: perspektiva multiple streams framework* [The process of creating Czech audiovisual legislation after 1989: the perspective of multiple streams framework] (M.A. thesis, Charles University, 2018), accessed August 11, 2020, https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/102739/120311249.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[4] Short-term strategies also exist and could be analysed but they are very specific and do not contain many traces of the legitimization discourse that is expressed in the long-term strategy documents. For an overview of strategies of Czech Film Fund see Czech Film Fund, "Legislativa," accessed September 3, 2020, https://fondkinematografie.cz/legislativa-a-koncepce/.

studies focused on the film policy of the UK and its historical development,[5] as well as a document very similar in nature to those published by CFF, entitled *BFI2020. Supporting UK Film*,[6] which discusses and legitimises various aspects of film funding in the UK and is published by the British Film Institute (BFI), the UK will be used in the following text occasionally as a point of reference. The UK is obviously a vastly different market (large central as opposed to the small peripheral market of Czechia) with a significantly longer history of state funding in capitalism, a different historical and socio-cultural context, and undergoing the process of Brexit. At the same time, film institutes, as opposed to film funds, tend to engage in a more direct, hands-on[7] fashion with the projects and institutions they fund,[8] which is also a notable difference. However, the comparison can still provide a useful perspective from which to look at Czech film policy because film policies of EU member states have been to some degree aligned and (despite Brexit) presently still have some common as well as some differing characteristics.

The study is, in part, theoretically inspired by works on the regulation of competition on European markets that emphasize different perspectives with which the regulation can be viewed, both in general and specifically in relation to film industries. Building on a critical political economy approach, Hubert Buch-Hansen and Angela Wigger (2011) differentiated in their analysis of European competition regulation four types of discourse reflecting positions[9] in relation to market regulation in Europe: Firstly, there is the *neoliberal discourse*, which demands market regulation to be restricted to a minimum, promotes competition, and ignores broader societal goals such as those related to social policy. The *National mercantilist discourse* seeks to strengthen the competitiveness of domestic companies against foreign competitors and is in favour of protecting strategies such as state aid and tax reductions. The *Euro-mercantilist discourse* is similar to national mercantilist discourse but gives

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5 See Toby Miller, "The film industry and the government: 'Endless Mr Beans and Mr Bonds'?," in *Critical Cultural Policy Studies. A Reader*, eds. Justin Lewis and Toby Miller (Malden: Blackwell, 2003); John Hill, "UK Film Policy, Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion," *Cultural Trends* 12, no. 2 (2004), https://doi.org/10.1080/0954896042000267134; John Hill, "Living with Hollywood: British film policy and the definition of 'nationality'," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 22, no. 5 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1223646.

6 British Film Institute, *BFI2020. Supporting UK Film*, 5, accessed August 11, 2020, https://www.bfi.org.uk/20022/downloads/bfi2022_EN.pdf.

7 See, for example the role of Danish film commissioners as delineated in Danish Film Institute, *Internal Guidelines for Film Commissioners* (Copenhagen: Danish Film Institute), accessed August 28, 2020, https://www.dfi.dk/files/docs/2018-02/dfi-film-commissioners-english%281%29.pdf.

8 I am grateful for this suggestion to Petr Szczepanik.

9 The positions of owners and managers, politicians, representatives of trade unions, as well as experts in the academia.

primacy to Europe-based globally competitive companies. And, finally, the *centre-left discourse* argues that competition should be regulated to encourage social inclusion, eliminate negative consequences for labour, etc.[10] This classification is inspiring for analyses of policies in European states and is employed in the analysis presented in this article. Nevertheless, in its narrow economic view, it does not reflect on specific concerns related to culture and prestige that commonly shape cultural policies. Neoliberal discourse is obviously a rationale of the American film industry, but most other countries support their national productions at least to some degree[11] and legitimize such interventions through various lines of argumentation, some of which are economically-oriented, but others less so. They may emphasise national cultural concerns regarding, for example, social cohesion and national prestige. As Justin Lewis and Toby Miller note, cultural policies "produce and animate institutions, practices, and agencies. One of their goals is to find, serve, and nurture a sense of belonging, through educational institutions and cultural industries."[12] Similarly, Michael Curtin notes that "governments will need to prioritize and even subsidize media institutions because they provide vital resources for local, national, and alternative cultures" and "play a vital role in making particular places worth living in."[13] According to Claude Forest, political discourses justifying public interventions in cinema follow essentially one of the following three goals: "to diminish inequalities in approach (social, geographical, etc.)", "to maintain the independence and prestige of national cinema" and "to support national production freed from the imperatives of standardization."[14]

Nevertheless, state regulations of film industries are not without their controversies and raise numerous questions, such as how to evaluate the impact of public support of cinema, if such interventions do not serve the interests of specific social groups rather than society in general, and if they do not generate other inequalities in the process.[15] It is also relevant to ask if public support of

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[10] Hubert Buch-Hansen and Angela Wigger, *The Politics of European Competition Regulation. A critical political economy perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 21-23.

[11] Anne Jäckel, "Film policy and cooperation between east and west: The case of France and Romania in the nineties," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 7, no. 1 (2000): 131, https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630009358137.

[12] Justin Lewis and Toby Miller, "Introduction," in *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader*, eds. Justin Lewis and Toby Miller (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 2.

[13] Michael Curtin, "Thinking Globally: From Media Imperialism to Media Capital," *in Media Industries. History, Theory, and Method*, eds. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Molden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 117.

[14] Claude Forest, *L'argent du cinéma. Introduction à l'économie du septième art* (Paris: Belin, 2000), 201.

[15] Forest, *L'argent du cinéma*, 200.

cinema really serves public interest and why other cultural activities should not enjoy the same level of support.[16]

As already mentioned, some film policies are explicitly focused on the support of national film as a commercial activity. Other film policies are implemented with the intent to support serious national culture. These two goals may be at odds,[17] or interconnected, given that cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital (e. g. through the development of film-induced tourism that brings money to film-related locations).[18] To give some concrete examples, John Hill mentions that, historically, "government film policy [in the UK] has been pre-eminently an industrial policy concerned with the preservation and support of commercial film making." The main aim of the government measures in this case is national mercantilist in its nature: to protect British cinema from the competition of Hollywood.[19] Later, under the Thatcher Government, Hill continues, "film policy moved more in the direction of 'pro-market' incentives such as tax reliefs intended to increase private, rather than public, investment in the industry,"[20] which is still a market regulation, but closer to the neoliberal agenda.

The support of film production, distribution, and exhibition (as well as other domains of cinema) sometimes explicitly focuses on the arthouse segment, which, it could be argued, serves better the community of intellectuals and cinephiles than society in general. One may ask if such support does not represent an unfair benefit for the educated class,[21] which already enjoys numerous other privileges associated with accumulated cultural capital. But at the same time, cultural capital may serve society as a whole (as was already mentioned, e.g. through wealth generated by film-induced tourism). Furthermore, film policies in some countries are specifically and explicitly designed to eliminate inequalities in their film industries and are legitimized by the centre-left discourse. For example, on the European level, the MEDIA programme was since its instigation in 1987 aiming at the protection of minority languages.[22] On the state level, British Film Institute's (BFI's) plan for film support in the years 2017-2022 strongly emphasises diversity in terms of "gender, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, social background or

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16 Forest, *L'argent du cinéma*, 200. See also Claude Forest, *Économies contemporaines du cinéma en Europe. L'improbable industrie* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2001), 60–62.

17 Miller, "The film industry," 139.

18 See Oxford Economics, *The Economic Impact of the UK Film Industry* (Oxford: Oxford Economics, 2012). I use the term film-induced tourism in a broader sense that covers travels not only to film locations but also to film festivals, movie premieres, etc. See e.g. Sue Beeton, *Film-induced Tourism* (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2005).

19 The Euro-mercantilist discourse and policies do the same on the European level.

20 Hill, "UK Film Policy," 32.

21 Forest, *Économies contemporaines*, 60.

22 Jäckel, *European Film Industries*, 68.

geographic location."[23] The film policy aiming at equality and diversity has been implemented in the UK because the degree of equality has been assessed as far from perfect.[24] Film policies of other states, on the other hand, may not necessarily address these issues in a significant way or at all, even though their film industries may be as unequal as that of the UK. Moreover, financial incentives for incoming foreign productions may even serve global media conglomerates *at the expense* of local "screen media workers and the many small firms that service the major producers,"[25] which is the opposite of what the centre-left discourse advocates.

To sum up, various forms of state support for cinema can have different goals, forms, and effects and be legitimized by different ideologies. And while the film policies of Europe and the European Union will not be addressed here extensively (and thus the Euro-mercantilist discourse will be of lower importance in the presented analysis), it needs to be added that individual European bodies also approach cinema and its funding differently. For example, the European Commission (which is an EU body) is interested in the competitiveness of European cinema and finding markets for "European films and audio-visual works […] beyond national and European borders".[26] The Council of Europe (a non-EU body) is more interested in diversity and "the contribution of the diverse national components to Europe's cultural identity".[27] In other words, some European bodies focus more on the economic aspects of cinema, others are more interested in European diversity and cultural identity. These policies create a background within which national film policies operate – to some degree in line with them and inspired by them.

Transformations and (Dis)continuities

When discussing transformations from socialism to capitalism after 1989 and the development of post-socialist markets, it is necessary to take into

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[23] British Film Institute, *BFI2020. Supporting UK Film*, 5.

[24] As Hill notes, "while minority ethnic groups account for around 9 per cent of the UK population (and nearly 30 per cent of the population of London where the film industry is concentrated), they account for only 1.6 per cent of the film and video production workforce. Women account for only 32.6 per cent of the production workforce and considerably less in specific occupational areas." Hill, "UK Film Policy, Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion," 35.

[25] Michael Curtin, "Regulating the global infrastructure of film labor exploitation," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 22, no. 5 (2016), 675.

[26] European Commission, "Media," accessed September 3, 2020, https://eacea.ec.ropa.eu/creative-europe/actions/media_en.

[27] Council of Europe, "Resolution (88) 15 Setting Up a European Support Fund for the Co-Production and Distribution of Creative Cinematographic and Audiovisual Works ('Eurimages')," accessed September 3, 2020, https://rm.coe.int/setting-up-a-european-support-fund-for-the-co-production-and-distribut/16804b86e2.

account that different forms of socialism have existed in individual countries and historical periods, and differences also exist among various forms of present-day capitalism.[28] The developments of individual (post-)socialist film industries necessarily took different directions shaped by different historical forces and circumstances.[29] And although the transformations of Eastern and Central European film industries from the capitalist to socialist economy and back brought with them significant ruptures and discontinuities, they were also accompanied by certain continuities.[30] For example, the "rupture" represented by the nationalization of the Czech film industry in 1945 was, in fact, a relatively seamless continuation and realization of ideas developed already in the 1930s,[31] a situation completely different from that of Poland, where the film industry was destroyed during the war (indeed marking a rupture) and had to be rebuilt.[32] Continuities (or similarities) may also be observed between the developments of the Czech film industry during the interwar period and the post-1989 era. These periods were both dynamic concerning the formation of film policies, especially the funding of cinema, regulation of production, distribution, and exhibition, and protection of the national market. New designs of film policies were considered unsatisfactory for an extended period of time and discussed at various political meetings and in the media in both the eras, and the policies themselves were revised and improved.[33] Furthermore, in both these periods, Europe was seen as a reference point and a source of inspiration for the establishment of Czech film policies, albeit obviously not in the same

[28] Not only between post-socialist and other capitalisms but also among individual post-socialist countries. Lawrence P. King, "Central European Capitalism in Comparative Perspective," in *Beyond Varieties of Capitalism: Conflict, Contradictions, and Complementarities in the European Economy*, eds. Bob Hancké, Martin Rhodes, and Mark Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[29] For comparison of Czech and Romanian film production and film production funding see Constantin Pârvulescu and Jan Hanzlík, "Beyond postsocialist and small: recent film production practices and state support for cinema in Czechia and Romania," *Studies in European Cinema* (2020), in print, https://doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2020.1736794.

[30] As Claudiu Turcuș notes in the case of Romanian cinema: Claudiu Turcuș, "Restructuring a Cinema That Didn't Exist. The Romanian Film Industry of the 1990s," *Iluminace* 29, no. 3 (2017): 24.

[31] See Tereza Dvořáková, *Idea filmové komory. Českomoravské filmové ústředí a kontinuita centralizačních tendencíve filmovém oboru 30. a 40. let* [The idea of a film chambre. The Czech-Moravian Film Headquarters and the Continuity of Centralization Tendencies in the Film Industry of the 1930s and 1940s], (PhD diss., Charles University, 2011), 307–310, accessed August 11, 2020, https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/140004477/?lang=cs.

[32] Petr Szczepanik, *Továrna Barrandov. Svět filmařů a politická moc 1945–1970*, [The Barrandov Factory. The World of Filmmakers and Political Power 1945-1970] (Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2016), 47.

[33] Ivan Klimeš, *Kinematografie a stát v českých zemích* [Cinematography and the state in the Czech lands] (Praha: Filozofická fakulta UK v Praze, 2016), 152; Bilík, "Small Country, Complex Film Policy."

way and to the same degree.[34] And the discussions of film policies included the problem of quality of Czech films, as well as the situation of film producers who were and are, due to the relative lack of financing and limited box office takings, not able to implement long-term investments and producer strategies.[35] The socialist period brought about a caesura in the debates, efforts, and legislation that had to be restarted after 1989, but the problems and questions addressed in the 1990s were similar to those intensely discussed in the 1930s.[36]

Generally speaking, we may identify three periods in the post-1989 development of relations between the Czech film industry and Czech film policy, with turning points represented, above all, by changes in Czech legislation. The early years (approximately 1989-1993) were characterized by somewhat chaotic transformation and privatization and progressive implementation of three new laws defining the conditions within which the film industry would operate.[37] The following period (approximately 1994-2012) was characterized by an increasing need for new legislation and advancing problems with the funding of the Czech Film Fund.[38] The second period ended with the introduction and implementation of a new law[39] at the turn of the year 2012/2013. The third period (2013 to the present) is characterized by a relative stability of film funding and progressive improvements in the operations of Czech Film Fund. It is also characterized by increasing endeavours to help Czech films achieve international recognition (not quite successful so far).

As František Pok notes in his detailed analysis of the development of Czech post-socialist film policies, after 1989, it was initially believed that Czech films would be profitable, and state support of cinema would not be necessary. However, this assumption soon turned out to be naïve, as representatives of the film industry were apparently not able to accurately assess

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[34] Klimeš, *Kinematografie a stát v českých zemích*, 153; Bilík, "Small Country, Complex Film Policy," 294.

[35] Petr Szczepanik, "Post-socialist producer: The production culture of a small-nation media industry," *Critical Studies in Television* 13, no. 2 (2018): 216, https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602018763546; Klimeš, *Kinematografie a stát v českých zemích*, 156.

[36] Petr Szczepanik, *Konzervy se slovy. Počátky zvukového filmu a česká mediální kultura 30. let* [Cans with words. The beginnings of sound film and the Czech media culture of the 1930s] (Brno: Host, 2009), 37 and 42.

[37] The last of which, implemented in 1993, actually made private film production legal, even though a number of films were made privately before. Act 483/1991: http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/ViewFile.aspx?type=c&id=2505; Act 241/ 1992: http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/ViewFile.aspx?type=c&id=2572; Act 273/1993: http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/ViewFile.aspx?type=c&id=2712. All accessed September 1, 2020.

[38] Previously known as The State Fund of the Czech Republic for Support and Development of the Czech Cinematography.

[39] Act 496/2012, accessed September 1, 2020, http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/View File.aspx?type=z&id=25147,.

the economic transformation and foresee its consequences.[40] But even when they realized that the support was necessary, right-wing politicians were opposed to the idea of state support of cinema and the path towards new, more adequate legislation was complicated particularly by Václav Klaus (prime minister between 1992 and 1997 and president between 2003 and 2013), who, endorsing a somewhat excessive neoliberal discourse, claimed that the film industry was a standard business and its support was unnecessary.[41] His views were somewhat bizarre in the context of European film industries (especially after Czechia joined the European Union in 2004) and despised (especially) by the community of filmmakers.[42] However, Klaus's argumentation was based precisely on the issue which Forest points out (see above): that state financing of cinema would create inequality and would put film industry in a privileged position in relation to "Czech music, Czech fine arts, and architecture, Czech literature, or Czech sports" that would not enjoy the same level of support.[43] One of the arguments against Klaus's views was that he did not differentiate between filmmaking and film industry,[44] a line of argumentation that put emphasis specifically on the support of film production and had its roots in the disputes related to the duality of cinema as "art and industry".[45] After numerous debates and unsuccessful attempts at new legislation, the neoliberal discourse regarding Czech film industry lost its strength. The motivation for reforms at that time was stemming mainly from the necessity to stabilize public funding of cinema in Czechia. The competitiveness of Czech films on international markets (in line with national mercantilist perspective) became a priority only very recently. This occurred owing to new debates about financial incentives that were initiated when Hungary introduced tax rebates and diverted foreign productions from Czechia to Hungary so that the protection of the national film industry became an even more pressing issue. Interestingly, it was large hotel chains that got involved in lobbying as they lost their clientele when foreign

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40 Pok, *Proces tvorby české audiovizuální legislativy po roce* 1989, 47-48.

41 Václav Klaus, "Prezident republiky Václav Klaus vetoval zákon o Státním fondu České republiky pro podporu a rozvoj české kinematografie," [The President of the Republic, Václav Klaus, vetoed the Act on the State Fund of the Czech Republic for the Support and Development of Czech Cinematography], May 12, 2006, accessed August 11, 2020, https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/1220, quoted in Pok, *Proces tvorby české audiovizuální legislativy po roce 1989*, 47.

42 A source in this sense is the article by the former chairman of the board of the Czech Audiovisual Producers' Association Pavel Strnad from the period of the most heated discussions: Pavel Strnad, "Osm filmových omylů Václava Klause," [Eight film mistakes of Václav Klaus], *Aktuálně*, May 24, 2006, accessed August 11, 2020, https://nazory.aktualne.cz/komentare/osm-filmovych-omylu-vaclava-klause/r~i:article:160753/.

43 Klaus, "Prezident republiky Václav Klaus vetoval."

44 Strnad, "Osm filmových omylů Václava Klause."

45 Laurent Créton, *Économie du cinéma* (Paris: Armand Colin 2014), 17.

productions started to prefer shooting in Hungary.[46] Another important factor was intense lobbying initiated by Helena Bezděk Fraňková, a strong personality who became the head of the Media and Audiovision Department of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.[47] The situation finally led to the implementation of a completely revised film legislation.

Even though the situation of film funding in Czechia has stabilized since the new law was passed, Czech film policy, and especially the strategies of Czech Film Fund are constantly in need of improvement as they had to be invented anew and could not rely on the tradition of several decades – like British Film Institute or Danish Film Institute, the latter of which is praised for its successful long-term "proactive, and internationalized strategy" that contributed to international accomplishments of Danish filmmakers and industry.[48] The question also remains whether the form of an institute would not serve Czech film culture better as it commonly integrates various aspects of cinema and is more involved in the industry. The Danish Film Institute, for example, according to Ib Bondebjerg, "addresses all aspects of filmmaking: from screenplay, preproduction and development, to production and distribution, through marketing – both nationally and internationally – and finally to the broader cultural dissemination of information about Danish film and film in general."[49] Its activities have gone far beyond mere funding and have helped Danish film immensely.

While the public discourse related to the state support of film production, distribution, and exhibition itself in Czechia transformed from neoliberal proclamations to securing internal stability of state financing of cinema and eventually to the national mercantilist agenda, the centre-left discourse that has been significant in the British film policy (see above) has not manifested notably in the Czech context. Various professions in the film industry (or rather in film production, which has been more thoroughly researched in this regard) have experienced decreased certainty associated with the transformation from studio employment to project-based hiring. The production sector overall remained relatively highly productive owing in part to the support of the public service Czech Television, the popularity of domestic films with Czech audiences,[50] and incoming foreign productions. But even though film professions did not change significantly in terms of the responsibilities and

[46] Pok, *Proces tvorby české audiovizuální legislativy po roce* 1989, 60.
[47] Pok, *Proces tvorby české audiovizuální legislativy po roce* 1989, 72.
[48] Ib Bondebjerg, "The Danish way: Danish film culture in a European and global perspective," in *Transnational Cinema in a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transition*, eds. Andrew Nestingen and Trevor Glen Elkington (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 122.
[49] Bondebjerg, "The Danish Way," 113.
[50] Pârvulescu and Hanzlík, "Beyond postsocialist and small."

tasks associated with them (at least not until the arrival of digitalisation), the labour market changed dramatically.[51] The state monopoly of the organization Československý film was disintegrated and the main producer, Barrandov Studio, was privatized in 1992 after its management in 1991 dismissed hundreds of studio employees who have been since that moment hired for projects as self-employed individuals. The then head of the studio Václav Marhoul who was responsible for these changes justified the layoffs by necessity (because the studio lost its financial backing by the state after 1989) and by "overemployment" of Barrandov Studio, as well as "laziness" and "incompetence" of its employees.[52] Interestingly, another member of the management in that era, Petr Prejda, mentioned that even after the layoffs, remaining employees of the studio were not present at work for a significant amount of time, and the studio lacked "any capitalist spirit".[53] What he meant by that was that employees were not diligently working for the studio but were rather undisciplined as if they were still working on secure positions in a state-owned company of the socialist era, not realizing that in the capitalist system jobs were no longer ensured by the state but rather competed for.

As King emphasises, the Czech, Hungarian and Polish variety of capitalism is in general characteristic, amongst other things, of weak unions[54] and "an almost complete lack of working-class political mobilization,"[55] which makes the position of workers difficult. And even though many individuals working in film production are now commonly hired as members of various teams ("semi-permanent work groups"),[56] such as a camera team, which makes the process of hiring easier for both the hirer and the hired, the system, nevertheless, provides individual crew members with lower job security and their hiring is dependent on their performance on the last job.[57] In this sense, the labour market is significantly shaped by neoliberal principles. This is so even with those working for international productions who, despite being better paid

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[51] For more on this see Jan Hanzlík, "Kariéry skriptek. Trh práce, pracovní proces a konstrukce genderu v české filmové a televizní výrobě," [Script careers. Labor market, work proces and gender construction in Czech film and television production], *Iluminace* 23, no. 4 (2011).

[52] Martin Švoma, "Chtěl jsem z Barrandova udělat krásnou a bohatou nevěstu. Rozhovor s Václavem Marhoulem," [I wanted to make Barrandov a beautiful and rich bride. Interview with Václav Marhoul], *Iluminace* 19, no. 1 (2004), 156.

[53] Martin Švoma, "Byl jsem hlavním strůjcem 'puče': Rozhovor s Petrem Prejdou," [I was the main architect of the ‚coup': Interview with Petr Prejda], *Iluminace* 19, no. 1 (2004), 171.

[54] King, "Central European Capitalism in Comparative Perspective," 316.

[55] King, "Central European Capitalism in Comparative Perspective," 307.

[56] Helen Blair, "'You're only as Good as Your Last Job': The Labour Process and Labour Market in the British Film Industry," *Work, Employment and Society* 15, no. 1 (2001), https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170122118814.

[57] As Blair succinctly emphasized by the title of her article about the labour market in the British film industry: "You're only as Good as Your Last Job."

than those working on domestic films, "are afforded less creative control, job security, and professional upward mobility than their colleagues in other sectors."[58] Petr Szczepanik, nevertheless, notes based on his research of international productions realized in Czechia that Czech workers employed on such productions "confronted with the precariousness of their working lives" "spotlighted difficulties caused by local policies, coworkers, and intermediary service companies" "[r]ather than denounce overseas producers."[59] This is surprising given that Hollywood runaway productions benefit from the above-mentioned lack of unions in post-socialist countries of East and Central Europe.

Furthermore, the neoliberal assumption that "competition alone produces efficiency and economic growth, and that bringing ever more areas of social life under the discipline of market competition will enhance welfare for all"[60] is not quite adhered to in the case of labour market in film production. Both Helen Blair in the case of the British film industry, and I in the case of the Czech film industry, mention that entry to attractive jobs in film production, is in many cases, secured for applicants by their relatives, partners, or friends.[61] On the one hand, a recommended person may represent "a lower risk [for the employer] than a completely unknown individual."[62] On the other hand, such practice does not represent an entirely fair market competition and could be, in fact, considered nepotist. In this sense the labour market perhaps serves some people better than others. And although Czechia does not seem to be exceptional in this regard, Czech film policy could benefit from some policy measures addressing equal opportunities.

One specific profession, the film producer, had to be established anew in Czechia because, in the pre-1989 era, only the state was allowed to produce films, and the model of producing (and especially film financing) from the 1930s could not be continued in its old version. Contemporary Czech film producers, operating on a small market with limited audiences and virtually non-existent international appeal of their films, see themselves, as Szczepanik put it, "as a largely disempowered, dependent, endangered species desperately looking for more stability, autonomy and recognition."[63] Their income is usually not generated by box office revenues and revenues from other distribution windows but rather as a percentage of film budgets.[64] While other film professions in the present-day Czech film industry were not explored in

[58] Petr Szczepanik, "Transnational Crews and Postsocialist Precarity," in *Precarious Creativity. Global Media, Local Labor*, eds. Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 89.
[59] Szczepanik, "Transnational Crews and Postsocialist Precarity," 90.
[60] Buch-Hansen and Wigger, *The Politics of European Competition Regulation*, xiv.
[61] Blair, "'You're only as Good';" Hanzlík, "Kariéry skriptek".
[62] Blair, "'You're only as Good'," 159.
[63] Szczepanik, "Post-socialist producer," 222.
[64] Around 7% share of the budget. See Szczepanik, "Post-socialist producer," 216.

detail by researchers, it is clear that the transformation of the labor market in the Czech film industry after 1989 represented significant discontinuation of the previous practice and headed more in the direction of neoliberalism than in the direction of the welfare state, which took many by surprise in the early years after the Velvet Revolution as their employment was no longer guaranteed in the long term by the state and its policies.[65] This was a result of the predominance of the neoliberal discourse in early post-1989 debates and apparent lack of a centre-left discourse, which would strive for the improvement of workers' position.

State Film Funding and the Discourse of Czech Film Fund

The following part of the text explores the discourse of CFF, which is the main body responsible for the allocation of state finances to various film-related institutions and activities. It focuses in detail on both CFF's *Long-Term Strategy 2014-2019* and *Long-Term Strategy 2017-2022*, as well as its later updated version from 2019. While this focus leaves aside, for example, the role Czech Television plays in support of Czech feature-length films intended for theatrical release and the related discourse of Czech Television (as well as less significant local film funds), it can still give us some idea about the priorities of current Czech film policy and conditions in which Czech film industry operates. Being European, Czech film policy obviously needs to conform to certain standards and legal framework of the EU but this does not mean that there would be no historical, cultural, and economic differences shaping current cultural policies of individual European countries.

The *Long-Term Strategy 2014-2019* names as the main priority of CFF's policy "the development of a cinema culturally valuable, artistically and socially beneficial and diverse in terms of themes, styles, genres, and kinds, and the strengthening of its position in the national culture and international competition."[66] Such phrasing does involve nurturing of national culture and building of national cultural prestige, even though there is no explicit reference to social cohesion and its reinforcement among the Czech population through film. At the same time, in its emphasis on the competitiveness of Czech cinema, the document displays quite explicitly elements of the national mercantilist discourse. This agenda continued to be present in the *Long-Term Strategy 2017-2022* and became even more pronounced in the *Updated Long-Term Strategy*

[65] See Švoma, "Chtěl jsem z Barrandova."

[66] Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2014-2019* [Long term concept 2014-2019], 2, accessed August 11, 2020, https://fondkinematografie.cz/assets/media/files/legislativa/dlouhodoba%20koncepce%20final%20design.pdf.

2017-2022, which accentuates the effort to "make Czech cinema more visible abroad" and create "more effective promotion of Czech cinema and financial incentives abroad."[67] Financial incentives designed particularly for incoming foreign productions are also legitimized by the national mercantilist discourse. *Long-Term Strategy 2017-2022* accentuates that they "increase employment of Czech film crew members who then bring their international experiences to Czech cinema, increase revenues of services and employment in other sectors, and in this sense represent a benefit for the Czech economy."[68] This seems to be perhaps, at least in part, a reaction to the above-mentioned complaints of workers employed on foreign productions who considered inadequate local policies a more significant problem than the precariousness of their professions. At the same time, the competition among states that want to attract foreign productions has been increasing in recent years, and Czechia had to accommodate its policy to this development.

Interestingly, the analysed documents do not seem to construe Czech films as European but rather construe Europe as a market on which Czech films compete, which is why they need to be made "competitive". There are no traces of the Euro-mercantilist discourse: Czechia may be a part of Europe and participate in the programme Creative Europe / MEDIA, but as far as CFF is concerned, Europe is a battlefield, in which Czech films struggle for their recognition. That said, European co-productions are appreciated because they allow "to acquire valuable creative and technological skills and make the Czech film industry more visible not only on the European market."[69] At the same time, Europe is continuously a reference point to which Czech cinema aspires. *Long-Term Strategy 2014-2019* specifically states among its aims and priorities that it seeks to "increase the potential of projects in terms of acquiring international co-productions" and "support the professionalization of the development of Czech films and bring it to the level of European standards in terms of quality, professions, and financing."[70] This expressed lack of self-confidence is interesting in comparison to BFI's document *BFI2020*, which recognizes some "challenges" the UK's film industry faces but boasts its achievements in both arthouse and commercial cinema, stating that "[t]here is overwhelming evidence of our creativity capturing global attention. From Ken Loach and Andrea Arnold being feted at Cannes, through films such as Bridget

[67] Czech Film Fund, *Aktualizace dlouhodobé koncepce 2017-2022*, [Update of long term concept 2017-2022], 6, accessed August 11, 2020, https://fondkinematografie.cz/assets/media/files/fond/DK_aktualizace_2019.pdf.

[68] Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2017-2022* [Long term concept 2017-2022], 12, accessed August 11, 2020, https://fondkinematografie.cz/assets/media/files/legislativa/DK_A5_FIN_online_kor5_FIN.pdf.

[69] Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2017-2022*, 6.

[70] Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2014-2019*, 3.

Jones's Baby capturing the hearts and minds of audiences worldwide."[71] Unfortunately, contemporary Czech cinema cannot boast such accomplishments, which, however, is not a consequence of it being a small market (as the case of incomparably more successful Denmark demonstrates) nor of it being a postsocialist film industry (as the case of internationally celebrated Romanian New Wave films shows).

Commercial success and participation in more prestigious festivals are understood in both CFF's and BFI's documents as the most important achievement a film (or rather a national film industry in general) can aspire to. But the CFF's documents do not explain why in detail and its support of Czech cinema's competitiveness on international markets is relatively recent in comparison to the activities of the BFI. For example, CFF has only recently included in its support schemes one dedicated to the participation of Czech films at international festivals (as a part of its support for promotion),[72] for which BFI has a separate fund.[73] Furthermore, the description of activities supported by the scheme is more explicit in the case of BFI than in the case of CFF. That said, the development of CFF's aims and goals has clearly been progressing in the same direction as those of BFI with its intent to bring money to the UK by "show[ing] the world that the UK means business."[74]

However, while the film policy of CFF, despite its recent progress, remains, more or less, within the confines of the national mercantilist discourse, the analysed document produced by BFI also contains a number of concerns that pertain to the centre-left discourse. First of all, it construes social mobility as a matter of "paramount importance",[75] and emphasizes one apparent weak point of the British film industry based on a previous analysis:

> "A recent BFI taskforce found significant obstacles for those who choose to pursue a career in the film industry, and diversity in the workforce is poor. So we are missing out on the talent and creative potential of a great number of young people that we really need for the future."[76]

In the CFF's documents, aspects of the centre-left discourse are expressed much less straightforwardly and only to a limited degree in its emphasis on

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71 British Film Institute, *BFI2020. Supporting UK Film*, 3.

72 Czech Film Fund, "Aktuální výzvy – propagace českého kinematografického díla," [Current challenges – promotion of Czech cinematographic work] accessed September 3, 2020, https://fondkinematografie.cz/zadosti-o-podporu/aktualni-vyzvy/aktualni-vyzva-propagaceceskeho-kinematografickeho-dila.html.

73 British Film Institute, "Film Export Fund," accessed September 3, 2020, https://www.bfi.org.uk/get-funding-support/funding-support-international-activity/film-export-fund.

74 British Film Institute, *BFI2020. Supporting UK Film*, 3.

75 British Film Institute, *BFI2020. Supporting UK Film*, 3.

76 British Film Institute, *BFI2020. Supporting UK Film*, 3.

diversity. It explicitly aims at supporting "neglected areas of film production" such as films for youth.[77] Concerning development, another aim is to increase

> "the quality and diversity of projects" through financial support (although it is not entirely clear what exactly diversity means here). Support in the segment of production aims, amongst other things, at the support of young filmmakers, short films, experimental films, etc. Distribution aims at "extending audiences for age, social, and other groups that are not regular visitors to cinemas."[78]

The focus on diversity in distribution is also stressed by the support of the distribution of artistically valuable foreign films because non-Hollywood non-Czech non-EU films are, to a certain degree, marginalized in Czech distribution.[79]

Yet, in the CFF's documents there is no emphasis on equality in terms of the labour market. Concerning gender equality policy, its absence appears to be the result of the refamilialization model of the distribution of gender roles that has developed in Czechia (and Slovakia) after 1989, which favours mothers' extended maternity leaves, does not support adequate funding for nurseries and until recently did not expect men to participate in child-raising chores.[80] As Hana Hašková and Steven Saxonberg mention, the model represents a continuation of the "conservative, Bismarkian social policies aimed to confine women at home" as well as the practice during the socialist era, which encouraged women to work but did not encourage men to share in the child-raising responsibilities.[81] Michaela Šmídová, Martin Vávra and Tomáš Čížek also point out a "high preference [in Czech society] for 'traditional' family roles of both women and men."[82] Thus, the relative absence of gender equality in current Czech film policy seems to stem from a lower emphasis on gender-related issues in current Czech policies and society in general.

The absence of emphasis on diversity and equality in terms of race and social background[83] in the documents produced by CFF can be explained by the

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77 Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2014-2019*, 3.

78 Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2014-2019*, 5.

79 On the reasons for this marginalization see Jan Hanzlík, "Limiting the unlimited: curation in Czech film distribution in the digital era," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, published online, https://doi.org/10.1080/2040350X.2020.1800892.

80 Hana Hašková and Steven Saxonberg, "The Institutional Roots of Post-Communist Family Policy: Comparing the Czech and Slovak Republics," in *Gender, Politics and Institutions. Towards a Feminist Institutionalism*, eds. Mona Lena Krook and Fiona Mackay (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

81 Hašková and Saxonberg, "The Institutional Roots of Post-Communist Family Policy," 115.

82 Michaela Šmídová, Martin Vávra and Tomáš Čížek, *Inventura předsudků* (Praha: Academia 2017), 47.

83 This, however, does not mean that there would be no cultural policy aimed at diversity. The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic provides financial support for cultural activities, e.g. of minorities, the elderly and the disabled, albeit none allocated directly to cinema. Ministerstvo kultury České republiky, "Regionální a národnostní kultura,"

absence of the history of diversity policy[84] in media in Czechia (perhaps related to the absence of colonial history), Czechia's highly homogenous population,[85] lower income inequality in comparison to the UK,[86] a significantly smaller population of Czechia, its film industry and the number of people employed in it, as well as apparent lack of strong Leftist voices in the council and management of CFF. With all these reasons combined, the centre-left discourse is comparatively much less accentuated in the documents produced by CFF (with the exception of the diversity regarding films themselves). And even though Czech society seems to be comparatively more equal and egalitarian than that of the UK, this is not to say that there would be no space for a film policy that would address, for instance, gender equality, which is an important issue that is continuously debated in many other countries.[87] For BFI, equal opportunities for everyone in the UK are clearly much more important and serve as a means of fostering cohesion among its inhabitants, while recognizing regional and local differences (at least in BFI's discourse).

Apart from the already mentioned strong emphasis on the building of the "prestige of the national cinema as a national cultural brand at home and abroad,"[88] the documents of CFF mention a whole range of other film-related activities, with specific aims and goals pertaining, e. g., to the digital restoration of archival films, film education for film professionals and laymen, and festivals with "national and international significance."[89] Furthermore, the *Long-Term Strategy 2017-2022* puts more emphasis on the regional development than the previous document.[90] This means that CFF is now more in line with the current film policy of BFI,[91] which emphasizes the support of local and regional activities and development of screen industries and related economic and cultural centres outside London.[92] These are all common goals of film policies

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[Regional and national culture], accessed August 11, 2020, https://www.mkcr.cz /regionalni-a-narodnostni-kultura-1243.html.

84 See Sarita Malik. "'Creative Diversity': UK Public Service Broadcasting After Multiculturalism," *Popular Communication* 11, no. 3 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1080/ 15405702.2013.810081.

85 Český statistický úřad, "Národnostní struktura obyvatel," [Ethnic structure of the population] 2, accessed August 19, 2020, https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/ 20551765/170223-14.pdf.

86 Eurostat, "Income inequality in the EU," accessed August 19, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/ eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20180426-1.

87 Martha M. Lauzen, "The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Films of 2019," accessed September 1, 2020, https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019_Celluloid_Ceiling_Report.pdf.

88 Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2014-2019*, 7.

89 Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2014-2019*, 11.

90 Czech Film Fund, *Dlouhodobá koncepce 2017-2022*, 6.

91 That, nevertheless, applies to a larger country and population.

92 British Film Institute, *BFI2020. Supporting UK Film*, 6.

of numerous European countries, the scale of which largely depends on available funds. In this respect, Czechia is a relatively indistinctive European country, and apparently in the process of developing even more standardized film policy according to successful Western European models.

Conclusions

Czech post-1989 film industry and film policy underwent a development from an early enthusiastic endorsement of neoliberalism through subsequent sobering and a struggle to internally stabilize the state funding of cinema, to the national mercantilist discourse that have emerged in most recent years. In this sense, the evolution of policies and related discourses progressed from initial naïveté towards a more pragmatic perspective that is more in line with Western European standards, even if Czech film policy has not been inspired by any particular national model and seems to be as yet underdeveloped in certain aspects.

The analysis of the recent discourse of Czech Film Fund revealed that Czech film policy legitimises state funding of cinema in a way that is similar to film policies of other European states, i.e., in cultural terms, as well as in economic terms through the national mercantilist discourse that emphasises the positive influence of cinema on employment and Czech economy in general, as well as the necessity of Czech film industry and Czech culture to be competitive on the European and world market. Cultural and economic concerns are both clearly present in CFF's documents, although they are, in some cases, less explicitly phrased than in the comparable document of BFI. A specific feature of the Czech film policy (in comparison to the current film policy of the UK) is a relative absence of the centre-left discourse that would accentuate diversity and equality in the labour market. This is so in part due to the relatively egalitarian Czech society but also because of the conservative views regarding gender roles, which are prevalent in contemporary Czech society, and also due to the specific characteristics of a small film market with its limited resources, job opportunities, and international prestige and exportability. The character of a relatively small and homogenous Czech population also explains the relatively low emphasis on equal opportunities for various groups of the population. Furthermore, the deepening political polarization of Czech society[93] could benefit from a more accentuated representation of national identity and building of a cohesive society through common themes in films – especially as Czech films are popular with domestic audiences. The question also remains whether

[93] See Petra Guasti, "Swerving Towards Deconsolidation? Democratic Consolidation and Civil Society in the Czech Republic," in *Czech Democracy in Crisis*, eds. Astrid Lorenz and Hana Formánková (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

the more hands-on model of film institutes (as established e.g., in Denmark, Poland, and the UK) would not serve the Czech film industry better than the model of film fund (as established e.g., in Germany and Hungary).[94] Yet although, for example, Polish Film Institute was praised for its involvement in the international success of the film *Cold War* as well as the film's nation-branding impact,[95] the success itself is not possible without the talent that needs to be recognized and supported in one way or another.

[94] An extensive comparison of individual public funding schemes in the countries of the EU is provided in European Audiovisual Observatory, *Mapping of film and audiovisual public funding criteria in the EU* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2019).

[95] Agnieszka Hess and Joanna Najbor, "Promotion of Polish Cinema Abroad as an Element of Nation Branding. Case Study of 'Cold War'" (2018) by Pawel Pawlikowski," *Sustainability* 12, no. 14 (2020).