

# Regional and Global Dimensions of Danish Film Culture and Film Policy

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Globalization is not a new phenomenon, for globalization and cultural interaction are a precondition for modern societies and culture. But the awareness of such interconnections and the strategic political responses to them have changed over time. In Denmark, film policy before 1990 was to a much larger degree defined by traditional notions of national culture, and by rather defensive cultural strategies. Developments at the level of both the European Union's film and media policies and Scandinavian models of co-production and collaboration since the 1990s have changed this.

Before 1987, Danish cinema and Danish film policy were not very internationally oriented, and apart from strategies for festival participation, the international policy was not very clearly profiled. A sign of changing times came when Gabriel Axel in 1988 won an Oscar for *Babette's Feast* (*Babettes gæstebud*, 1987), and even more so when in the same year Bille August won the Palme d'Or for *Pelle the Conquerer* (*Pelle Erobreren*, 1987), followed by an Oscar in 1989. Since then both Danish film and television have been an increasingly international business and also a global success. The number of important international prizes for Danish films is impressive given the size of the country, and the number of Danish film directors and film actors now making films abroad, especially in the United States, is also increasing. The enormous success of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR Drama (five Emmys since 2002, see Bondebjerg and Redvall 2013), with exports of drama to an increasingly global market, has fundamentally changed the game for the entire Danish film and television culture.

This development has a background in strategies in the Danish film and television industry toward greater internationalization. An obvious example of this development is the production company Zentropa, founded in 1992 by Peter Aalbæk Jensen and Lars von Trier and with Vibeke Windeløv, Lars von Trier's producer until 2008, as a key figure with a large, international network. From a position as mostly the company producing Trier's films, Zentropa has developed a very active international strategy based on a strong transnational co-production profile and the establishing of transnational partnerships and a corresponding company structure. As of 2004

Zentropa was the owner or co-owner of more than 40 production companies abroad (Pedersen and Matthieu 2009, 118f). In many ways Zentropa could be seen as an example of two forms of transnationalization, which Mette Hjort has called “milieu-building transnationalism” and “opportunistic transnationalism” (Hjort 2010, 18f). Zentropa has certainly tried to develop national and transnational production networks, through the establishing of Filmbyen in Avedøre in 1999 (a place intended to create synergy and creative collaboration), and with such collective, transnational initiatives as Dogme 95 or the Scottish–Danish co-production initiative with Sigma Films, “Advance Party” (see also Ostrowska 2005). But Zentropa has also been very much aware of how to get money from Nordic and European funds, and in 2000 Zentropa was named “European Producer of the Year,” just as its distribution company, Trust Film Sales, also won the Eurimages prize as “European Exporter of the Year.” That this role as a major Nordic and European producer and distributor is not easy is reflected in Zentropa’s having to merge with Nordisk in 2008; a huge injection of new capital was needed to continue the transnational strategy.

Lars von Trier’s many prizes in Cannes, Bier’s Oscar and Golden Globe for *In a Better World* in 2010, and Zentropa’s success with other films and directors, have been some of the important results of Zentropa’s strategy. The increased film political focus on international distribution and transnational co-production at the Danish Film Institute (DFI) has also been an important driver of this development. The broader internationalization of Danish film and television culture has its background in a new film policy and a new institutional development involving both the national level, the Scandinavian level—for instance the role of Nordic Film and TV Fund (established in 1992)—and not least the European level. The international branding of Danish film was further enhanced with the Dogme 95 manifesto, initiated by among others Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, as a relaunching of a European art cinema concept with historical dimensions (Hjort and MacKenzie 2003). Politics, business, and genuine interest in developing film as an art form run through the policies and funding mechanisms of the DFI and go hand in hand with Zentropa’s international strategy (Finney 2010, 80f; Pedersen, Boutaiba, and Pedersen 2009, 113ff). Zentropa has clearly been the market leader in Danish film culture since the 1990s, in terms of co-production and global distribution strategies and in terms of using transnational funding structures. Yet, these strategic trends and developments are not just tied to Zentropa, but have become part of the way in which the Danish film and television system now operates in European, Scandinavian, and wider global markets.

## The Birth of a Modern, National Film Culture

Denmark has laws on film and film culture dating back to the 1930s, but public support for film production was until 1964 mostly dedicated to documentary films, which were considered a valuable educational tool for the general public. Feature films were

something the market took care of. But already in the first cinema laws in Denmark, passed between 1933 and 1938, a combination of taxes and regulations were installed to ensure cultural diversity and to preserve the national film culture. As a small national film culture, Danish film culture was of course vulnerable to foreign competition, especially from the US, the UK, and other large European cinema cultures. Until the late 1950s, Danish film culture was actually doing quite well—although only on a national basis, with Carl Th. Dreyer as the international exception.

The laws regulating cinemas and film before 1964 were very selective and also highly paternalistic in their view of film as a medium. The new cinema act of 1964 repealed the entertainment tax on films, accepted film as an important medium and art form in the context of modern culture, and, faced with the dramatic crisis of national film production after the rise of television, created a system with direct public support for film production. The 1964 act paved the way for a modern, national film policy, and many of the elements established here inspired later laws: film school support, support and loans for film production, renovation of and support for cinemas—and, as something new, support for Danish film participation in international film festivals (Act of cinemas and film 1964/Lov om film og biografer. Lov nr. 155 af 27. Maj 1964, § 18). Close scrutiny of this act quickly reveals that it was passed before the period of globalization, since it does not define what is meant by “promoting film art in Denmark” (§17. 1) or by “a Danish film” (mentioned several times). One can only assume that these terms were seen as self-evident and thus as requiring no definitions. A new international horizon is on the other hand visible in the report *Biografbevillingssystemet*/Report on the system on cinema funding (Report no. 582 1970), which was part of the preparations leading to a radically new film act, passed in 1972. In the 1970 report, arguing for the liberalization of the cinema market, a comparative analysis of international cinema systems is included.

In the 1972 film act that established the Danish Film Institute as the central body for feature film support (with the Danish Film Museum and the National Film Board of Denmark [focusing on documentary films] as separate bodies), the preamble still makes reference to support for film culture in Denmark. But the fact that Denmark joined the European Union that same year, and that there thus was the anticipation of more international cooperation, is visible in two ways: (i) a definition of what counts as a Danish film is now provided, and (ii) the concept of a co-production is inscribed in the act. The definition of a Danish film is, however, focused on national culture: “According to this law, a Danish film is a film recorded in Danish and with a predominantly Danish artistic and technical crew” (§ 21, my translation). But in following sections of the act, the possibility of exceptions to this main rule is allowed, so that films with an international cast and co-financing can be accepted as Danish and thus receive public support.

A major test of this more international understanding of Danish film and film culture came in 1984, when Lars von Trier’s first Cannes winner (Prix Technique), *The Element of Crime*, failed to receive any support, because it was an English-language film with an international cast and crew. This symbolic event marks the

watershed between the first phase of a modern Danish film policy and the second and much more global phase, and forced a more international orientation in film policy and film support. The Trier incident in 1984 was one of the reasons for the change toward a more international support system and the liberalization of the national criteria that we find in the 1989 and following cinema acts.

### Changing the Game, Breaking Borders

The emerging international recognition of Danish cinema in the late 1990s, and the provocative revival of a new kind of low-budget art film as an international brand with *Dogme 95*, coincided with other shifts in the balance between national, European, and global cultural trends. The establishing of the Nordic Film and Television Fund (NFTF) in 1990 indicates a move toward international co-production and distribution for both television and film. With the NFTF, the national film institutes and broadcasters joined forces to give Nordic audiovisual culture a stronger voice, both in the Nordic region and globally. The dynamic growth in European cultural policy and the increased policy effort for a unified, European audiovisual market and for European co-production and distribution are also reflected in the creation of Eurimages in 1989 and the EU MEDIA programs in 1991. The early “symbolic” success enjoyed by Danish cinema internationally and the increased globalization of cinema and tendencies toward enhanced and new Nordic and European strategies sent a clear message to politicians in Denmark. The message was that the whole audiovisual cultural sector was of increasing importance in an emerging digital media culture that was clearly set to be global. That is, it was not just about culture, but also about a new and rapidly developing economic sector. “Creative industries,” a term used widely in European and national policy documents after 2000 and one crucial to the European Commission document *Creative Europe—A new framework programme for the cultural and creative sectors (2014–2020)* (European Commission COM (2011) 786/2), points to this combined understanding of the audiovisual as a both cultural and economic factor.

In 1997 the developments outlined above were reflected in a new Danish cinema act and the reorganization of the previous Danish Film Institute, merging all the previously separate film institutions and integrating support for all types of films and all parts of the public film policy from development, production, and distribution, to archiving and film research. The first CEO of this reorganized organization, Henning Camre (appointed in January 1998), was put in charge of a major change and professionalization of the DFI, and in spring 1999 the DFI published a four-year plan (DFI 1999) for a very proactive strategy for Danish films, which resulted in an increase of the DFI’s budget with 450 million Danish kroner over four years (roughly 61 million euros). One of the guiding principles was that increased quality will follow from increased quantity, and as a consequence

the number of films supported per year was gradually doubled. But monies were also allocated to support young talents and development, always a risk for private investors seeking the more secure formulae. The larger sums were thus not used to increase the budgets of specific films, but to produce more films and many different types of films. One central aim with the first four-year plan was to strengthen the production, quality, diversity, and breadth of Danish film and the broader film culture and to increase the rather low share on the national cinema market (DFI 1999a). But this apparently national strategy was also part of an international strategy, in the sense that co-financing and co-production were viewed as crucial to success, with success clearly encompassing the Nordic and European markets.

Referring to this aspect of the DFI's strategy, Mette Hjort talks about "the transnationalizing state" (Hjort 2005, 15 f.) and in the years to come this strategy would prove very successful, as Denmark was able to collect a very large share of Nordic and European co-production monies. The national investment paid off, not just at home, but also abroad. The film and television production sector in Denmark was clearly transnationalized from around 2000 and this underlines the fact that a national cultural policy can develop in a transnational context. Behind this clear transnationalization of Danish film and the expansion of a more global film economy with a basis in a public, national funding system, we also find a change in the concept and understanding of what constitutes a Danish film. The more restricted cultural definitions of the earlier acts are now replaced by a more open and functional definition. In the rather detailed § 17 in the act of 1997 the opening sentence is as follows: "A 'Danish film' in this act shall mean a film of which the producer is Danish. Furthermore, the soundtrack of the film shall be in the Danish language, or the film shall have special artistic or technical features which contribute to the promotion of film art and film culture in Denmark." Whereas the first part of this sentence points to a more essentialist and cultural notion of Danish culture, the second makes the support for film available to products that do not have essential, national characteristics. All of Lars von Trier's films and an increasing number of films made by other "Danish" directors underscore the importance of this: a Danish film is by now also a film in English, or any other language, with many actors from abroad and shot outside Denmark etc. In subsequent subsections of the 1997 act, the legalities of this dimension are further spelled out, so that films by foreign production companies with, for instance, a Danish minor co-producer can qualify for support. There is furthermore a special indication (17.4) to the effect that these requirements regarding "residence, citizenship, registered office, etc. in Denmark" shall lapse if they prove to be in conflict with international agreements, for instance in the European Union.

The DFI has published four action plans (*Handlingsplan*) since 1999, stating its visions and goals for a new period. These plans and visions expressed by the DFI have then been part of the political negotiations for a new four-year film agreement (*Filmaftale*), with the Ministry of Culture specifying goals to be achieved in specific

areas. The first film agreement ran from 1999 to 2002, the second from 2003 to 2006, and the third from 2007 to 2010. The fourth film agreement, running from 2011 to 2014, has now been replaced by the new film agreement covering 2015 to 2018. Although film agreements like this often have very stable mission statements, core values and goals, because they represent political deals involving a broad majority of political parties, it is quite clear that a change from a more national identity agenda to a more transnational agenda is taking place. However, in the four agreements in question a tension between the national cultural agenda and a more global strategy is also evident. The 1999–2002 agreement is, for example, less oriented toward cultural identity than the one from 2003–2006. In the 1999–2002 vision of things, a balance is maintained between the task of securing a diverse production of Danish films for a national audience and the dissemination of Danish films abroad, and it is specifically underlined that the DFI must work to strengthen international cooperation and the European dimension. The section on international collaboration and co-production is much more detailed and action oriented than in the 2003–2006 agreement. In 1999 the agreement states:

The European cinema market is dominated by American films. The vision behind the existing Nordic and European collaboration is to strengthen the national films and their transnational distribution ... The vision behind the international film cooperation is on the one hand to maintain and further develop national film production, and to contribute to the development of European film culture. Denmark must contribute to stronger co-production on a Nordic and European level by increasing the economic resources for this area (DFI 1999a,12, my translation).

In the 2003–2006 (DFI 2003) agreement the international dimension is clearly reduced, no doubt under the influence of the liberal-conservative government, supported by the very nationally oriented The Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti), with its clear re-nationalization agenda. In the summary of the contract, the Ministry of Culture under the heading "Vision," clearly states that the "DFI must work to create the optimal framework so Danish film can continue to fulfill its role as a leading cultural factor and bearer of Danish language and identity" (Ministry of Culture 2002, press release, my translation). But if globalization seems to have been taken off at least the political agenda between 2003–2006, this had a rather limited effect—if any at all—on the actual policies and transnational trends in Danish film culture. In both the 2007–2010 (DFI 2007) and the 2011–2014 (DFI 2011) agreements, and very much in the strategic plans and reports from the DFI leading up to the political agreements, the international elements return with full force and result in concrete initiatives. This can be seen as a result of a change in the political climate under the new center-left government in Denmark from 2011, but it also has much to do with the obvious international success of Danish film and television abroad. The international dimension of Danish film was not in contrast to the national: the national success was also very obvious.

On the cover of the 2007–2010 strategic plan the DFI proudly quotes a comment from *The Observer* (September 25, 2005): “At the moment, Denmark is producing the most thoughtful and interesting films not only in Scandinavia but in western Europe.” The Preface goes on to stress that “films bring Denmark out into the world,” that “globalization gives us access to an understanding of other cultures,” and that “films are building connections between a Danish identity and the international world of media” (DFI 2007, 3, my translation). This strategic plan from the DFI also clearly develops a digital strategy as a part of an international strategy, just as the creation of *Copenhagen Think Tank on European Film and Film Policy* indicates the will to set a new transnational European agenda and to enhance internationalization. The goals are clearly expressed in the film agreement for this period. In the DFI’s strategic plan, how Danish film performs internationally and what can be done to increase the international and European dimension of film collaboration are also duly noted, with the support of empirical data. It is for instance clearly stated that Denmark must increase the investment in foreign film production (Ibid. 18). The background for this is an “imbalance” whereby Danish films after 2000 have been able to get 132 million Danish kroner (18 million euros) abroad but have only invested 18 million Danish kroner (2.5 million euros) in foreign films.

### A Transnational Film Culture?

In connection with the 2011–2014 film agreement, the transnational dimension went to the top of the agenda, reflecting the position Danish film had acquired as one of the best-performing national cinemas in both the Nordic region and Europe as such—relative to the size of the Danish market. In the presentation of the new four-year film agreement, the Ministry of Culture indicated that globalization should be developed as an even more active strategy for Danish film (Ministry of Culture 2010). But this statement about the transnational success and position of Danish film and the proactive, international vision was also underlined in a DFI report, “Analysis of the Market Potential of Danish Films in Europe and the Nordic Countries” (*Analyse af dansk films markedspotentiale i Europa og Norden*, DFI 2010) and in a similar report produced for the Ministry of Culture, “Danish Film. A Strong Position for the Global Marketing of Denmark” (*Dansk film. En styrkeposition for den globale markedsføring af Danmark*, DFI 2010a).

In the second report on film as a part of a global marketing and branding of Denmark we see a clear national parallel to the EU policies for creative media industries, a strategy clearly based on the fact that cultural industries as such are now considered an important part of the modern, global economy. The report (DFI 2010a, 7) specifically talks about the integration of culture and industrial policy and about using film as part of a branding of Denmark as a creative and innovative nation. It is noted that around 40 percent of all Danish films reach an international

audience and that an increased effort to support distribution and advertising will have broad, positive effects on other economic sectors and policy areas. With some pride the report also states that Danish films do not cater to an international mainstream taste, but get their success by being Danish (Ibid. 4), or as it is later stated, by building on a common Nordic tradition. The national and regional are thus seen as a positive contribution to the global. The report also discusses the difference between high concept films and auteur/art house films, and concludes that Danish films so far have gained their international success mainly through art house films. This is not least underlined by the fact that 80 percent of the Danish films with an international distribution until around 2010 were distributed by TrustNordisk and all under the category “art house films” (Ibid. 18).

If we look at the top 10 list of Danish films with an international distribution after 2000, shown in Table 1.1, a rather clear picture appears, at least when we look at cinema figures.

### Lumiere Database and DFI Figures

The data clearly illustrate that Lars von Trier and Susanne Bier are the top two Danish brands internationally; only a few other directors and types of films can match the foreign sales figures of these two directors. But it is worth noticing that the Danish animated film has a high international profile, here represented by *Help! I'm a Fish* and *The Ugly Duckling and Me*, the last film also getting a boost internationally from the Hans Christian Andersen brand. Two Dogme films are represented on this list, indicating the continuing power of Dogme 95 abroad: Lone Sherfig's *Italian for Beginners* and Susanne Bier's *Open Hearts*, both in a way representing the mix of the Dogme aesthetics and the officially forbidden use of genre formulae, in this case romantic comedy and melodrama, respectively. Nikolaj Arcel's film *A Royal Affair* is the first historical drama for a long time in Danish cinema, and apparently this kind of film connects well with the international brand of heritage cinema, which has been pursued especially in the UK.

This top 10 list indicates the films with the highest, international value in Danish cinema since 2000, but it is important to stress that also films with lower figures on the list, placed from no. 11 and further down, are doing quite well. As the report from the DFI states, it is in fact a *general pattern* for Danish films to be getting a much broader, international distribution. The master of social realism in contemporary Danish film drama, Per Fly, had a solid national, Scandinavian success with his trilogy *The Bench* (*Bænken*, 2000), *Inheritance* (*Arven*, 2003) and *Manslaughter* (*Drabet*, 2005), and *Inheritance*, co-produced with Norway, Sweden and UK, had a national audience of 375,751 and an international audience of 280,870. Also, Anders Thomas Jensen's absurd social and religious allegory *Adam's Apples* (*Adams æbler*, 2005), co-produced with Germany, attracted a national cinema audience of 356,371 and an even bigger international audience of 442,669. International distribution



**Table 1.1** Top 10 Danish films 2000–2012: National, Nordic, European, and US cinema tickets

Title	Year	Director	Total	National	Nordic	Rest of Europe	US/Canada
<i>Dancer in the Dark</i>	2000	Lars von Trier	4,549,699	202,782	212,076	3,378,934	755,907
<i>Italian for Beginners (Italiensk for begyndere)</i>	2000	Lone Scherfig	3,732,555	819,553	358,373	1,786,910	767,719
<i>Dogville</i>	2003	Lars von Trier	2,499,465	109,735	94,908	2,047,641	247,181
<i>Help! I'm a Fish (Hjælp! Jeg er en fisk)</i>	2000	Stefan Fjeldmark & Michael Hegner	2,483,802	355,233	170,017	1,958,552	0
<i>Melancholia</i>	2011	Lars von Trier	1,997,240	56,687	90,523	1,532,564	317,462
<i>After the Wedding (Efter brylluppet)</i>	2006	Susanne Bier	1,359,002	388,010	197,411	551,047	222,534
<i>In a Better World (Hævnen)</i>	2010	Susanne Bier	1,294,108	406,435	224,197	942,687	127,224
<i>The Ugly Duckling and Me (Den grimme ælling og mig)</i>	2006	Michael Hegner & Karsten Küllerich	1,216,295	108,267	56,991	1,051,037	0
<i>A Royal Affair (En kongelig affære)</i>	2012	Nikolaj Arcel	964,868	557,992	60,992	345,702	0
<i>Open Hearts (Elsker dig for evigt)</i>	2002	Susanne Bier	919,582	506,493	156,087	255,417	0

seems to be about auteur brands, genres, themes and stories, but most certainly also about establishing effective co-production and co-distribution networks, at times with the help of prizes and festival networks. Many of the Danish films with international distribution that have made it to the top of the list have been at the more prestigious festivals and have won prizes, but the total number of festivals that Danish films generally go to every year is also quite impressive.<sup>1</sup> Together the DFI and the film production companies have clearly intensified the work of establishing international film networks over the last decade or so. To this one might add that the relative success of international Danish festivals, CPH:PIX for mostly feature films and CPH:DOX for documentary films, has also contributed to the international brand value of Danish film. The DFI's report "Analysis of Danish Film's Market Potential in Europe and the Nordic Region" (*Analyse af dansk films markedspotentiale i Europa og Norden*, DFI 2010, 15) clearly indicates that Denmark has the strongest position on the European market of all the Scandinavian countries, followed by Sweden, which has a slightly stronger profile in Scandinavia (see Table 1.2).

The average annual figures shown in Table 1.2 demonstrate the importance of international distribution, also economically, for Danish and Scandinavian cinema. Even though the national box office is still very dominant it is not insignificant that almost 1.2 million tickets are in fact sold in Europe, the US, and Canada. The European dimension of national films in Europe has been a case of concern for many years, and it still is, but at least the figures are improving. The US figures on the other hand are very poor, especially compared to the US figures in the EU. It might also be a little surprising, given the strong regional collaboration in Scandinavia, that the distribution between the Scandinavian countries is unimpressive. However, here figures from television reveal another image, just as the co-production and distribution of Scandinavian film and television drama show a strong Scandinavian profile (Bondebjerg and Redvall 2011).

## Zentropa and the Transnational Challenge

As already demonstrated, Danish film policy since the late 1990s has followed a clear transnational strategy supporting co-production and collaboration between production companies and television stations in not just Scandinavia and Europe, but also to a certain degree other parts of the world. The very concept of what counts as a Danish film has also been profoundly changed so that support is given to films with an all-international cast and story. The number of co-productions has gone up since 2000, including support for foreign films in which Danish companies are minor co-producers. The empirical data on the international audience for Danish films indicate that this has been a successful film policy and that the Danish production companies have been able to use both the national and the transnational structures for support and funding to create a transnational success. This development is not just

**Table 1.2** Key data for film production in Scandinavia 2003–2008, average pr. year (cinema data)

Country	Production of films pr. year	Total box office	National box office	Scandinavian box office (excl. own territory)	European box office (excl. Scandinavia)	US/Canada box office	Number of films distributed in Scandinavia	Number of films distributed in EU
Denmark	34	4.747.240	3.383.541	201.500	1.083.913	78.286	11	12
Sweden	40	4.309.355	3.195.659	390.913	690.473	32.310	14	8
Norway	24	2.279.626	1.948.977	27.170	303.480	—	5	4
Finland	17	1.583.076	1.351.937	58.391	172.748	—	5	4
Iceland	4	136.264	48.740	4.752	82.773	—	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>13.055.561</b>	<b>9.928.853</b>	<b>682.726</b>	<b>2.333.386</b>	<b>110.596</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>30</b>

Danish. In fact, in his book *The International Film Business. A Market Guide Beyond Hollywood* (2010), Angus Finney points to a strong tendency in Europe to increase and further develop co-production and distribution and “harness additional finance and distribution potential beyond their national support system” (Finney 2010, 75). He also notes that the negative examples of “Euro-puddings”—the speculative use of co-financing with implications for the film’s narrative, theme, and style—have been largely avoided.

It is no wonder that Angus Finney uses Zentropa as a case to demonstrate the intertwined effects of a transnationalization of national film policies and European co-production and distribution and a general strengthening of creative networks. All this is very much the result of European film and media policy. Eurimages, EU MEDIA, and the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production (1992) seem to have professionalized and streamlined European co-production and distribution. Zentropa has been a key player in Denmark in this European development, and the majority of the successful, transnational Danish films after 2000 have been produced by Zentropa through different forms of international collaboration.

Finney describes Zentropa as “an enigma” in comparison to the normal, commercial film production company (Finney 2010, 80) and certainly Zentropa’s lead director and co-owner Lars von Trier is an enigmatic director, just as the other owner, Peter Aalbæk Jensen, is known for his very creative form of leadership and way of communicating with the public and the media. But Zentropa has managed to keep the creative dynamic in their many and very diverse films and film cultural initiatives. They have been able to recruit some of the most powerful names in Danish cinema. This is a sign of the strength and flexibility of the Danish film policy and film funding system and of the system being quite open to transnational collaboration. So even though Zentropa is known for taking creative risks, for experimenting, and also for running into serious economic difficulties, the company also embodies the creative strength of a transnational company operating successfully with a small nation-state perspective.

The list of works from Zentropa is a list of important European films made by Danish directors, but in collaboration with many European and other partners, and foreign films made by Zentropa or by one of the Zentropa International affiliated companies in collaboration with European partners. Zentropa’s base is no doubt Denmark, and they have benefited from the Danish film policy and funding system. But Zentropa is also by now an international player, and the so far biggest Scandinavian film production company. Zentropa International has affiliates in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Scotland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway, and has also established strategic partnerships in for instance Finland, Estonia, and Latvia. This makes it much easier for Zentropa to become involved in co-productions, and sometimes the company can co-produce with its own international affiliates. The company structure is in fact a truly transnational network, and even though Danish directors are prominent in Zentropa’s list, the company has also been involved in other films, in France, Germany, Sweden, and the UK.

In 2009, the then chief financial director of Zentropa explained the transnational strategy of the company as follows:

We want to conquer the world in our own quiet way. With timely care and common sense. It costs a lot of money to set up operations in every country. It's our plan, within three or five years, to be fully represented with operating companies in the old Western Europe. And it's not unlikely either, that we will be making films in the US within a similar time frame ... To comply with national and international regulations for receiving subsidies, we have been keeping offices in several countries. But in the long run, just dipping our snout into other countries' troughs is too one-sided. No matter how good you are at making movies, no country will keep subsidising you. They want to give you a leg up, but they also want something in return (Nielsen 2009).

But what kind of transnational challenge and transnational strategy are we talking about here, besides the obvious economic dimension of co-production and broader transnational distribution of film? How have the national and European film policies and the strategies of a company like Zentropa connected? In her article "On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism" (2010, 13f), Mette Hjort usefully distinguishes between what she calls strong and weak and marked and unmarked forms of transnationality in film and film production. A strong form of transnationality can be defined by a high degree of transnational collaboration in production, distribution, and reception, and a film would qualify as an example of marked transnationality if the makers of the film "intentionally direct the attention of viewers towards various transnational properties that encourage thinking about transnationality" (Hjort 2010, 14).

As Hjort also points out, individual films can represent a strong form of transnationality in terms of production, distribution, and reception without necessarily having a marked transnationality as a film. A film like Susanne Bier's *Open Hearts* was only financed nationally by DR and the DFI, but nevertheless it got a quite wide, transnational distribution. This probably has a lot to do with the fact that it was a Dogme 95 film, and as such had a certain marked transnationality in terms of its cinematic concept, but the film in itself was a quite nationally oriented drama. By contrast, Susanne Bier's later film, *In a Better World*, is clearly a more strongly transnational film seen from a production and distribution perspective, with both EU and Scandinavian funding and distribution to 15 countries all over the world. The film is also an example of marked transnationalism, as the theme and narrative constantly merge global, cosmopolitan, and local dimensions.

The most transnational director of Danish cinema, in all senses of the word, is Lars von Trier, and the production and distribution profile of all his films since *Breaking the Waves* (1996) has been defined by an extremely strong co-production set-up involving several countries, a transnational cast, a very wide transnational distribution, and stories that reference existentially universal and transnational themes. Trier's films thus reflect the very core of Zentropa's strategy, which is not only to conquer the world, as

the financial director puts it, but in fact to maintain, sustain, and develop a space for independent filmmaking and artistic diversity in a world with very dominant and big players. The many initiatives at Zentropa (Dogme 95, Dogumentary, The Film Town in Avedøre, The Film Factory—aiming at young talent) point to the company's national and international profile as the unconventional film rebel—a position very much taken by Trier himself as a European director.

But even though Zentropa's transnational strategy is a result of a deliberate attempt to create a platform for independence, including independence for a national film culture and film policy, it also reflects developments within the context of national film policy. Transnational filmmaking is without a doubt very much about finding the money and the larger audience, and in that sense it is economically driven. But as Zentropa's films, and in fact many other Danish films after 2000 show, transnationalization is not just about the money, it is also about preserving a diversity of filmmaking in the world, by working together in Europe. It is about creating resistance and alternatives to a blockbuster-style homogenization of global cinema (Hjort 2010, 15). The transnational strategy of Zentropa is here in line with both the basic funding policies of the DFI and the new strategies for a more global world. The national strategy for film support in Denmark is very much about developing artistic diversity in filmmaking, a fundamental issue also laid down in *The European Convention of Co-Production* (1992). At work here, then, is a very strong principle, at both the national and European levels of film policy, against cultural homogenization. This principle is one that Zentropa, among others, has taken to a new transnational level. But since 2007 the national strategy in Danish film policy has been taken to a transnational level. This is reflected not only in the changed concept of what constitutes a Danish film, but also in very concrete initiatives for co-production, including minor co-productions, and a much intensified effort to put Danish film in general on the global map. This tendency has resulted in concrete policy initiatives on the national level, as is the case in the already mentioned report, *Danish Film. A Strong Position for the Global Marketing of Denmark*, where we find both cultural and economic dimensions. It can also be seen in some of the initiatives taken at a broader Scandinavian level, for instance NFTF's *High Five*. *High Five* is a project bringing all five Nordic countries together in the launching of new film initiatives, both in production and distribution.

### The Transnational World of Lars von Trier and Susanne Bier

Lars von Trier was from the very start of his career a Danish director with a strong European dimension, making films in English. This created problems at a national level in the beginning of his career, but since 1996 most of his films have been co-produced with Germany, France, Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands and occasionally also Norway, Iceland, and Finland. What is more, the result of this co-production strategy is clearly a strong transnational distribution network, one extending in the case of some films as far as the US. As Table 1.3 shows, Trier's films since 1996 (8)

**Table 1.3** Audience for Lars Von Trier's films 1996–2011, regional shares, ranked by total audience

<i>Film and co-producing countries</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Scandinavia</i>	<i>EU/US</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Dancer in the Dark</i> (2000) DK/ FR/SE/DE/NO/NL/IS	202.782	202.164	4.152.139 (US: 765.000)	4.557.085
<i>Breaking the Waves</i> (1996) DK/SE/FR/NL	298.608	345.604	3.504.655 (US: 897.000)	4.148.867
<i>Dogville</i> (2003) DK/SE/FR/NL/DE/NO/GB	109.759	94.908	2.442.747 (US: 283.000)	2.537.655
<i>Melancholia</i> (2011) DK/SE/FR/DE/IT	56.687	90.493	1.850.060 (US: 317.500)	1.997.240
<i>Antichrist</i> (2009) DK/DE/FR/SE/IT	82.003	35.747	741.124 (US: 0)	858.874
<i>The Idiots</i> (1998) DK	119.892	122.087	597.494 (US: 0)	839.473
<i>The Boss of It All</i> (2006) DK/SE/IS/IT/FR/NO/FI/DE	18.522	46.453	453.090 (US: 0)	518.065
<i>Manderlay</i> (2004) DK/SE/FR/GB/NL/DE	21.423	10.008	243.781 (US: 3790)	275.032
<b>Total</b>	<b>909.490</b>	<b>947.464</b>	<b>13.985.090</b> <b>(US: 2.266.290)</b>	<b>15.842.050</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>113.686</b>	<b>118.433</b>	<b>1.748.136</b> <b>(US: 283.286)</b>	<b>1.980.256</b>

Source: Lumiere Database.

have sold almost 16 million cinema tickets worldwide, an average per film of nearly 2 million. However, his films are often not a success at home; they only become a success because of a wider European audience.<sup>2</sup> This profile is similar to other Scandinavian art cinema directors, such as Norwegian Bent Hamer or Swedish Roy Andersson (see Bondebjerg and Redvall 2011, 87ff).

There is no doubt that co-producing has a certain transnational effect. Among the Scandinavian countries, Sweden, the most stable co-production partner for Lars von Trier, is also the country where most people see his films, and the same goes for Germany and France. In 2006 Lars von Trier's image as a leading European art cinema director was so established that even his Danish language comedy with a completely national cast, *The Boss of It All* (*Direktøren for det hele*) was co-produced with seven countries. The Dogme effect is clear in *The Idiots*, which although it was financed exclusively with Danish money, managed to reach a rather differentiated, transnational audience. But co-production is of course not the only factor behind Trier's transnational success. Genre and other more intrinsic elements also play an important role if you want to reach an audience beyond the more narrow art cinema group. *Dancer in the Dark* and *Breaking the Waves* are Trier's largest successes to

date, and in those films he plays with some of the basic mainstream genres, the musical and melodrama, in a more direct way than in some of his other films. Also, in a similar vein, *Melancholia* flirts with the disaster movie. These are also the three films that have given Trier a still small, but nevertheless noticeable American art cinema audience, with all three films jointly seen by 1,980,659 Americans.

Trier has won several European prizes for his films, for instance *Element of Crime* (Technical prize, Cannes, 1985), *Europa* (three prizes in Cannes, 1991), *Breaking the Waves* (Jury Grand Prix, Cannes, 1996, and César as best European Film, 1997) and finally *Dancer in the Dark* (Palme d'Or, Cannes, 2000). He also received the Nordic Council's Film Prize for *Antichrist* in 2009. It is significant for his status as a European art film director that his connection to Cannes seems pretty permanent, with almost all of his films selected for this festival. As the data for his films show, although he has a reputation for being an enfant terrible and a provocateur, both in his public appearances and in his films (see also Hjort 2011), he is the only living Danish director with a firm grip on a broad, European audience. Neither his national nor his Scandinavian audience can match his European audience, and even though he is not widely seen in the US, he is clearly the most transnational icon of contemporary Danish cinema.

Trier's international, female "rival" on the international film scene, is Susanne Bier, also, until recently, a Zentropa director. However, despite clear inspiration from a European art cinema tradition in some of her films, among them her Dogme film, *Open Hearts* (*Elsker dig for evigt*), Bier tends to use mainstream narratives and a more mainstream style in her psychological and social dramas. An indication of this is that her breakthrough to a large Danish audience, *The One and Only* (*Den eneste ene*, 1999) a classic romantic comedy, remains the most seen film in Danish cinemas since 1990. Even though the film was screened at a huge number of international festivals, it has not attracted any cinemagoing audiences outside Denmark, and even barely in the rest of Scandinavia. In Table 1.4 this film tops the list of tickets in Danish cinemas with 843,470 tickets, and compared to Trier (see Table 1.3) her ability to sell tickets in Denmark is much better: Bier's average per film is 490,253 vs. Trier's 113,686.

But the data in Table 1.4 also reveal that even though Bier is clearly a transnational brand and an international success, Trier is still—also in quantitative and commercial terms—the most significant Danish director, in transnational terms. Where Bier's total international average of sold tickets is 999,759, Trier's is 1,980,256. What Trier loses on the national and Scandinavian market is more than compensated for by large European sales. Bier is also relatively strong on the European market, but the perhaps most interesting difference lies in their relation to American film culture. Trier is certainly embraced by some parts of the independent American film culture, and *Dancer in the Dark* was nominated for an Oscar. But Bier was the one who was invited to direct her first American film, *Things We Lost in the Fire* (2007), a low budget film (estimated \$16 million), even compared with normal American independent standards. Furthermore in 2009 Lionsgate chose Jim Sheridan to direct a remake of *Brothers* which grossed \$43,318 million,



**Table 1.4** Audience for Susanne Bier's films 1996–2011, regional shares, ranked in terms of total audience numbers

Film and co-producing countries	Denmark	Scandinavia	Europe	US/Canada	Total
<i>After the Wedding</i> (2006) DK/GB	388.010	197.473	558.871	222.534	1.366.888
<i>In a Better World</i> (2010) DK/SE/DE	406.435	224.197	942.687	127.224	1.294.108
<i>The One and Only</i> (1999), DK	843.472	104.500	0	0	947.972
<i>Open Hearts</i> (2002), DK	506.493	156.087	255.648	1.354	919.582
<i>Things We Lost in the Fire</i> (2007) US/GB	219.314	13.498	193.514	477.807	904.133
<i>All You Need is Love</i> (2012) DK/SE/FR/DE/IT	643.571	38.061	143.900	0	826.072
<i>Brothers</i> (2004) DK/GB/NO/SE	424.479	21.871	293.209	0	739.559
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.431.774</b>	<b>755.687</b>	<b>2.387.829</b>	<b>828.919</b>	<b>6.998.314</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>490.253</b>	<b>107.955</b>	<b>341.118</b>	<b>118.417</b>	<b>999.759</b>

Source: Lumiere Database.

making it a reasonable American independent success. Even though the film was not a commercial success (total world gross \$8.5 million), it paved the way for Bier's American status (all box office data according to <http://boxofficemojo.com>, accessed July 17, 2013). In 2010 this trend culminated with her winning not just an Oscar, but also a Golden Globe for *In a Better World*. But it is also worth noting that even though Bier in many ways has a stronger presence overall on the American market, Trier's films still sell more tickets even there, an average of 283,286 vs. Bier's 118,417.

### Small Nation, Strong Transnational Profile: Concluding Perspectives

Susanne Bier was not just awarded a Golden Globe and an Oscar for best foreign film for *In a Better World* in 2010, she was also awarded the Best European Director prize in 2011, a prize won by Lars von Trier for *Dogville* in 2003. What is more, in 2011 Lars von Trier also won the award for Best European Film with *Melancholia*. International prizes do not tell the whole story of a small nation's transnational status and success, but compared to the size of the Danish market, the number of

prizes for Danish films has been simply remarkable. The fact that this is not just a film phenomenon, but that also Danish television drama since 2000 has won no fewer than five Emmy awards and a BAFTA, and is experiencing a surprising European and wider international success, points to structural conditions and a solid policy framework for audiovisual production in Denmark. One of the key reasons for success is a high degree of artistic freedom, combined with professionalism, and part of this professionalism is an openness toward transnational collaboration and inspiration.

In an interview in 2000 Susanne Bier expressed her cosmopolitan attitude and openness in the following way:

I am very sceptical of the kind of new nationalism that insists that we must protect everything Danish. I don't think Danish culture is in any way threatened. Cultures have to be strong enough to resist an encounter with other cultures. If they aren't, then there's no reason to sustain them. I am convinced that whatever is worth preserving in Danish culture easily can accommodate a significant degree of inspiration from, and interaction with, lots of other cultures (Bier in Hjort and Bondebjerg 2000, 243).

There is a strong cosmopolitan and universal dimension in both Bier's and Trier's latest films, but they are also rooted in more concrete spaces of everyday life. Bier has developed a double narrative strategy in *In a Better World*, *Brothers*, and *After the Wedding*, a strategy where global problems are reflected and mirrored in a local, national universe. Poverty and human tragedy in underdeveloped parts of the world and the tragedies behind our engagement in wars abroad are connected to social and psychological conflicts in our Western world. In *In a Better World* violence, revenge, terror, and human failure are not just part of a distant reality, but enter the idyllic context of a more provincial Danish life. The story tells us that we are all part of a global pattern, although we may try to ignore or reject it, that our actions and ways of living have universal elements. In this sense the film has a very Danish reality to it and at the same time a very global dimension.

Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, on the other hand, is a mythic and symbolic tale of the end of the world as we know it. The clash between the earth and another planet in the film is visually stunning and symbolically powerful, a global memento mori to us all, no matter where we live. The cast and language of the film are in many ways more international than Bier's, yet at the same time, in the middle of this strangely symbolic, apocalyptic, and abstract tale, there is a psychological and social reality. But unlike Bier's universe where plots and characters take a realistic form, in Trier's work they become half-sedated pawns in a semi-realistic plot around a wedding gone off track.

The film and television culture in Denmark in general and in particular the films of Lars von Trier and Susanne Bier indicate that despite all the problems with being a very small nation in a more and more globalized world, a nation with a language spoken by no one else in the world, an open, transnational strategy can

actually pay off. As both Jäckel (2003) and Finney (2010) have pointed out in their analysis of the European film culture, there are many challenges involved in being a loose “unity in diversity” culture, a network of small and bigger film cultures trying to work together and function as an open window and market for distribution of films between various sovereign states. But the combination of national and regional support, and of co-production and central EU funding, can create transnational European success, without any loss of national contexts and audiences.

The vitality of Danish filmmakers after Dogme 95 is a good sign for the future. In January 2013 five Danish directors (Thomas Vinterberg, Lone Scherfig, Per Fly, Janus Metz, Ole Christian Madsen) and one Icelandic director (Dagur Kári) formed a collective film company, Creative Alliance, with the expressed intention “to combine the best of Scandinavian film traditions and practices with the strength and scale of the film industry in the United States” (Creative Alliance Manifesto 2013).<sup>3</sup> The manifesto directly expresses an internationalization principle inasmuch as it claims that: (1) contemporary cinema is the international cinema; (2) films should be developed for a worldwide audience; and (3) new transnational business models for film development and financing are needed. So this manifesto is in fact a case of a strong and marked transnational film strategy, one that, in line with Dogme 95, stresses the collective. The manifesto is also consistent with European and Danish traditions and film policies emphasizing artistic and creative freedom for the auteur and originality.

The directors involved in this initiative are some of the most innovative and successful directors in contemporary cinema, and this manifesto, compared with Dogme 95, points to the strong cosmopolitan and transnational mentality in new Danish cinema.<sup>4</sup> The present Danish success and transnational outlook are certainly not repeated in all European countries and in general the transnational distribution of European films remains overly weak. The digital future will offer technological solutions that can increase the speed with which transnational films and television distributions are accessed—but technology alone cannot do it. In the coming decades, European cultural policy is crucial.

## Notes

- 1 In *Dansk Film. En styrkeposition for den globale markedsføring af Danmark* (DFI 2010, 20) the number of film festivals worldwide is estimated at 3,500 (festivals for all types of films). Danish films participate in around 400 festivals a year, of these about 260 feature film festivals. Some Danish films are shown at 20–30 festivals around the world.
- 2 The data used here are from the European Audiovisual Observatory, The Lumiere Database, which is quite accurate when it comes to European and US data for cinema sales. But the data do not reflect sales in other parts of the world, for instance South America, Asia, and Africa. Lars von Trier clearly also has an audience in these regions, so the figures for his films worldwide are larger than the figures for his EU/US sales.

- 3 The forming of Creative Alliance was reported in both the Danish and foreign press in January 2013, for instance in *The Hollywood Reporter* (see Roxborough 2013) and also on the DFI's website (see Michelsen 2013).
- 4 Dagur Kári, Lone Scherfig, Per Fly, Thomas Vinterberg, Janus Metz, Ole Christian Madsen.

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