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► To cite this version:

Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb. The meaning of ‘quality’ in feature Film policy selective aid scheme A French/UK cross-cultural perspective. Colloque “ Les politiques de l’audiovisuel dans les pays anglophones / Film and Television Policies in English-speaking Countries ”, CinEcoSA (Cinéma, Economie & Sociétés Anglophones - Cinema, Economy in English-Speaking Countries), Oct 2013, Saint-Denis, France. halshs-01875396

HAL Id: halshs-01875396

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01875396>

Submitted on 18 Sep 2018

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The meaning of ‘quality’ in feature Film policy selective aid scheme.

A French/UK cross-cultural perspective.

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If papers analyzing the meaning of the concept of quality in common public policies are frequent, academic papers regarding quality and approaches to its assessment in film policies are atypical and relatively recent (Levaratto 2000; Ginsburgh 2003; Blomkamp 2011). Europe has a long tradition of state support for the film industry but with national and cultural differences regarding what kind of movies could benefit from the selective aid schemes. Although practices vary between countries (i/e The National Lottery financing cinema subsidies in UK *Vs* tax on admissions allocating advances on receipts in France), the European film-making model privileges generally creativity over commercial success (Herold 2010) and puts the bulk of state efforts on production rather than on distribution or film exhibition. This ‘authorship business model’ (Liz 2012) aiming to promote creativity and national identity (Jäckel 2007) is based on a consensus about the question of the feature quality recognized to be supported by state selective subsidies (Gimello-Mesplomb 2012). This consensus is shared both by experts and film policy-makers (Blomkamp 2015). Experts Committees are the places where movies quality evaluation criteria are (re-)built and discussed (Begin and *al.* 2000). It is a fact Film policies are usually presented as fixed systems and are often studied synchronically. But a diachronically approach in a Foucault’s perspective investigating the origins and the transformation of the concept of Quality in Film Policy allows to appreciate and characterize these cultural differences in the national traditions of state support for the arts. Moreover, Film historiography generally considers film policies majors steps (creation of funds, censorship affairs...) as simple consequences of major improvements of the film art worldwide or, sometimes, as positive assets helping it (i/e the connection between the creation of the French selective aid scheme in 1959 and the emergence of New wave French cinema) (Gimello-Mesplomb 2006). From two national cases (France and UK) we can discuss and enlighten how ‘quality’ has been the main argument to justify existence and efficiency of selective aid scheme in both countries. We suggest also to explore the meaning of this term in some historical key-contexts of film and television industry.

E. Blomkamp notes although they are not particularly concerned with the issue of legitimation, German scholars Rein and Schön (1993) point out that “some policy practitioners use rhetorical frames strategically in their quest for legitimacy: In their public utterances, policy makers may hitch on to a dominant frame and its conventional metaphors (the free market, privatization, and ‘community empowerment’, for example, or, in film, “cultural diversity”, supporting “independent production”), hoping thereby to purchase legitimacy for a course of action actually inspired by different intentions” (Blomkamp 2015). In the aim to understand the analysis of France and UK film funding policy, we have experimented to merge the concept of “metanarrative” suggested by Blomkamp for the New Zealand Film Commission’s Short Film Fund with the concept of *explicit* and *implicit* in public policy developed by British cultural policy scholars working on the French case, especially the works produced within the Center for Cultural policy studies in University of Warwick by Pr. Oliver Bennet and Jeremy Ahearne, probably the most interested group focused on history of French cultural policy debates. In a collective 2009 issue of the *Journal of Cultural Policy* following a conference organized in Leeds in 2008, this research group headlines in the *introduction* what ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ cultural policy means. Indeed, as key point out this issue defines cultural policies as ‘explicit, in that their objectives are openly described as “cultural” (i/e supporting artistic “quality”) and implicit, in that their cultural objectives are concealed or described in other terms. However, in his own individual contribution to this issue, Jeremy Ahearne refined this deceptively simple opposition, identifying two further levels in the meaning of ‘implicit cultural policy’, which seem quite distinct. The first level is the ‘*unintended cultural side effects of various kinds of policy*’; the second is ‘*those deliberate courses of action intended to shape cultures but which are not expressly thematised as such*’ (Ahearne 2009). This latter meaning of ‘implicit’ policy is of special interest to us here, for it helps us rethink the apparent invisibility of a whole range of popular cinema generally excluded from public subsidies because too much *commercial* orientated and often viewed as Americanized productions. Following a methodology suggested by Martine Danan (Danan 2000), we have collected a corpus of dozens of public affairs reporting within the past 15 years cases of art movies funded (or excluded) by film grants in France because viewed from a variety of approaches as “foreign” movies : Milos Forman’s *Valmont* in 1989, Jean-Jacques Annaud’s *L’Amant* in 1992, Luc Besson’s *The Fifth Element* (1997), the *Journal d’Anne Frank* in 2002 and *The Artist* (2011), a French movie recognized worldwide for his quality but refused by the national selection committee when he applied for the Advance on receipts in France. Danan notes the “1999 legislation is seeking to

reverse the trend once more while achieving a delicate balance between English and French language productions through a flexible point system” : although the use of French is technically encouraged with a 25 percent bonus, subsidies are now available to English language co-productions and the controversies on these movies are interesting to analyze because these shows the most controversial movies granted are movies privileging more a “technical quality style” (Gimello-Mesplomb 2012) and formal aspects than scripts aspects. When an independent French high-budget and technical-quality movie is, in same time, based on a good script, French selective committees seem to have difficulties to clearly use basic quality criterions and finally select the movie to be allocated while in UK, past UKFK and nowadays selective aids allocated through British Film Institute are most clear : encouraging this range of movies, is supporting the national film industry. 2011 was the most successful year in over two decades for British film granted by public subsidies of the selective aid scheme at the box office. The movie *The King's Speech* was the highest grossing independent British film of all time, earning £45 m at UK cinemas and £266m worldwide. However, the 2011 Report to Government produced by the Film Policy Review Panel entitled "A Future For British Film. It begins with the audience..." notes “the UK independent market share continues to depend on the performance of the top two or three titles and *The King's Speech* and *The Inbetweeners* together accounted for almost two-thirds of independent UK film earnings (10 per cent of the total box office)”. Danan also notes that “Since the mid-1980s, as a response to the pressure of globalizing economic forces and stronger competition from Hollywood blockbusters, French government officials have repeatedly stated the urgent need to boost the international presence of French cinema” (Danan 2000). We can cite the creation of the COSIP (extension of automatic and selective film aid to TV and video productions) and a subsequent report on film exportation strategies by the head of the French film board (Fonds Sud cinema, export grants), the Centre National de la Cinematographie (CNC). However an ambiguity remains between this *explicit* cultural policy for French cinema drawn by officials and the *implicit* at the selection committee level. In a recent academic thesis presented for the habilitation for supervise research we considerate experts within a selection committee in the situation to judge the quality of a movie as “ordinary people placed in extraordinary circumstances” (Gimello-Mesplomb 2012).

Regarding the criterions, we have to distinguish two aid processes: the *automatic* and the *selective*. Automatic funds, generally based either on actual receipts or estimated ones, create a strong link between a production and its market. A dozen different countries have

established automatic film funds in Europe. In the United Kingdom it was abolished in the 1980s and substituted by a selective granted from the mid-90's by National Lottery and locally administrated by the Regions. Automatic funds account for 48% of funding to the production sector in Spain, 71% in France, 10% in Germany and 8% in Italy. The *selective scheme* is based on quality criteria. In a common cultural policy democratic way, the measure of the quality cannot be distinguished other than the model of the *experts committee* (Ginsburgh & Weyers 1999). But selective Film support policy in France was source of a huge controversy in film community about the quality criteria adopted by French Government and the *experts committees* practical implementation, in the political context of the 1946 Blum-Byrnes agreement, a part of the Marshall Plan (Léglise 1982). Clearly presented as an alternative to the dominant Hollywood model, French cinema selective aid scheme has finally served industry professionals well, both within the French context and internationally (Ulff-Moller 1999). In UK, the situation is quite different. The framing of film as art disappeared from UK policy discourse from the early 2000 to 2010, year of the dissolution of the UKFC (UK Film Council) existence. During this period, UK Film Council was seen more as an instrument of the public policy than a leading agency devoted to the defense of national expression though granted movies. Today, a new approach is framed to encourage in UK collaborations between producers and distributors in a creative industry way. This explicit aim is assumed as a part of the economic development. In "A Future for British Film – it begins with the audience", including 56 recommendations for the Government, industry and British Film Institute (BFI) published by an independent review popular panel of 1500 people chaired by Lord Chris Smith, and commissioned in 2011 by Culture Minister Ed Vaizey, new policy measures to support the production of British films suggest among others to increase audience choice and grow the demand for British films in the UK and overseas.

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