

BACKGROUND

Entering into a co-production is an important decision that opens doors to funding and new partnerships.

However, many producers have also experienced, that some of these doors lead to lack of control, issues with cultural differences and unexpected disagreements about contracts - all at the expense of creativity and the film production.

The [Documentary Conventions](#) in Leipzig 2018 and 2019, organized by [AFAC](#) & [DOX BOX](#), took up the challenge of tackling some of these issues, asking ourselves:

“What questions should we be asking before entering a co-production?”

We considered this topic with the firm belief that awareness and clear expectations are as important as §§ and budgets.

*As we ask ourselves this, we have one basic ambition: **To make better films because of co-production.***

During the Documentary Convention and a think tank organized at IDFA 2018, film professionals from different backgrounds and countries met to discuss the reality of co-production - ranging from the successes to the disappointments. Over the course of these different sessions, the following list of questions was formulated and refined to instigate a conversation.

We invite all involved in co-production, including funders, to participate in this conversation and spread the word.

Fair Co-Production

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF ON THE WAY TOWARDS BETTER CO-PRODUCTION PRACTICE

What are your expectations from the co-production?

Your reasons for entering a co-production can be as good as any other but it can be a productive exercise for you to have a clear idea of those reasons yourself. Is it to get access to funding, to involve your partner's knowledge and creative skills, to have access to crew and facilities.

Exchanging expectations between the partners before signing the co-production agreement can prevent many misunderstandings and uncomfortable discussions in the future.

What are your criteria for success?

It's likely that not all expectations for the co-production will be met. However, there will be some minimum goals that need to be achieved in order to regard the co-production as a success.

If your co-producer thinks that your minimum criteria are unrealistic, you have an issue to address.

How important is this film to you?

Directors invest years of their lives to realize a project, characters commit to sharing their story, producers take financial risks, and in some cases, the team behind a film put their lives on the line. The necessity of making a film will vary from one partner to the other.

In a co-production, it should be clear what is at stake for each partner involved.

What can you bring to the co-production?

Some of your contributions - such as financing, creative staff, etc. - will be included in the co-production agreement. However, you may also have other useful soft skills. Perhaps you are an exceptional negotiator, have an eye for script editing or are an excel-wizard - these are all skills that could be beneficial to the project.

Write them down and send them to your co-producer.

What do you know about your co-producer's production reality?

The production landscape always differs from country to country – in some cases dramatically. While in some countries, producers can count on support from film funds and broadcasters, this also means they must deal with these institutions' expectations and administrative requirements. In other countries, there are no institutions that support film and producers can only access international film funds.

Political restrictions, complicated legal framework, the level of bureaucracy, cinema traditions - each country has its own rules and co-producers should be aware of the realities their future partners have to deal with.

Considering these issues can be vital to avoid the potential obstacles that come with transnational co-production.

Did you meet the director before entering the co-production?

Co-producing not only changes the conditions for the producer but also for the director. If the director is not aware of the changes that the co-production might impose on the film and their artistic freedom, it can easily cause problems. And vice versa: if you as a co-producer are not aware of the director's artistic ambitions with the film, working method etc. you might find yourself with a different film and a different collaboration than expected.

A long, deep exchange between the director and all co-producers is just as important as discussions between the producers.

Where did you meet?

Choosing a partner with whom to enter a long-term engagement, with all legal and creative consequences it implies, should not be an overnight decision done through email. The investment of time and money into getting to know your partners and having a face to face meeting will pay off in the long run.

If the film is shot and produced in the home country of the director and delegate producer, a meeting there can be of great importance for you as the minority producer, to better understand the culture and production environment of the film.

Are you conscious about the shift in balance?

Bringing in a new partner will always change the power dynamics within a co-operation - even more so if the new co-production partner comes from a production environment with a stronger economy, more established institutions, etc. In some cases, the co-producer brings more financing to the co-production than the delegate producer, who then becomes the minority producer.

Discussing such changes in positions can be of the utmost importance for the co-production, including for the director.

Does bigger financing mean bigger share?

In many countries, the tradition is that the financial investment a producer brings to the project determines the percentage of the income from revenues. What this tradition does not reflect is the investment of time and work prior to entering the co-production. If the delegate producer and the director have spent time and money on the development and production of the project before the moment of entering a co-production, this should be reflected in the share.

A fair evaluation of the value of work versus money can be imperative for a good co-production.

Tradition is tradition – not law.

Enjoy!