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Hard facts, soft measures: Gender, quality and inequality debates in Danish film and television in the 2010s

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Abstract

This article investigates discussions about gender, quality and equality in Danish film and television in the 2010s. Contrary to Sweden, where gender diversity has been part of public debate and formal screen policy since the 2000s, there was little discussion of gender in the Danish screen industry until the Danish Film Institute (DFI) began focusing on diversity as a priority area before the Film Strategy for 2015–18. The article analyses how both DFI and industry players have continuously argued against gender quotas, instead opting for soft measures such as ‘gender declarations’ and initiatives to raise awareness. One of these initiatives was a manifesto, ManusFestet, that used humour to raise questions about gender representation on-screen. The article discusses how a balance between hard facts and soft measures seems to be experienced as a constructive way forward, as long as this combination does in fact facilitate the intended change.

Keywords

Danish film

screen policy

diversity

gender

quality and inequality

ManusFestet

This article investigates the ways in which gender and equality in the screen sector have been approached and discussed in the Danish film and television industry in the 2010s. Comparing the arguments and approaches to tackling inequality in the gender debate in Denmark and Sweden since the millennium, we analyse how gender inequality has been

framed as a policy, industry and individual problem in the Danish screen industry in the 2010s.

Contrary to Sweden, where gender diversity has been part of both public debate and formal screen policy since the turn of the millennium, there was little focus on discussing issues of gender in the Danish screen industry in the early 2000s. This gradually changed in the 2010s when the Danish Film Institute (DFI) began to focus on 'diversity' as a key priority area, coinciding with negotiations with politicians, stakeholders and industry that preceded the Film Strategy for 2015–18. In this strategy, set by the Danish parliament, DFI was tasked with researching, mapping and monitoring 'diversity' (Filmaftalen 2014: 8). This new focus led to a number of reports, consultations, debate meetings and action group initiatives about how to facilitate change. The debate centred on whether the best approach was top-down structural regulation of the film funding framework – such as gender quotas – or gradually changing production and commissioning cultures by creating increased awareness about the state of affairs and possible conscious or unconscious gender biases.

The article outlines how the DFI has sought to involve the industry in solving the complex task of addressing diversity and equality to ensure a sense of legitimacy in the strategies chosen and through listening to many different viewpoints in the process. Drawing on comparisons to the Swedish screen industry, the article demonstrates that both DFI and some industry partners have continuously resisted and argued against gender quotas, instead opting for soft measures such as 'gender declarations' of cast and crew when applying for support and initiatives to raise awareness among practitioners and producers as well as commissioners. Foregrounding the role institutions played in

shaping the gender debate and its outcomes, the investigation considers how and why a balance between hard facts about inequality and soft measures seems to be experienced, presented and portrayed as a constructive way forward, as long as this combination will in fact facilitate the intended improvements in gender balance that are an explicit goal in film and cultural–political policy and in the industry itself.

Methods

The article sets out to chart the public debate between policy-makers, screen agencies and the industry at consultations and industry events in Denmark in the 2010s to analyse how consensus building around certain topics was constituted – and challenged – within the Danish film industry. Inspired by critical discourse analysis (Lazar 2007; van Dijk 1993), the analysis focuses on the role that empowered institutions (in particular DFI) and trade associations (in particular Danish Film Directors’ and the Danish Writers’ Guilds) played in shaping the gender debate within the industry and its outcomes. This debate is ongoing and will have wide-ranging consequences for equality and diversity in the Danish screen sector in the future.

The starting point for the research was material generated through three international workshops, ‘Commissioning Creativity and Funding Film’, held in Glasgow and Copenhagen during 2016–17. These workshops brought together the Heads of and key staff from DFI, the Swedish Film Institute (SFI), the Norwegian Film Institute, Creative Scotland and Screen Netherlands to discuss common challenges that face screen funding in smaller Northern European nations today.^[1] Gender was continuously an issue in a number of the workshop discussions, and it was evident that there were very different

national strategies for approaching this topic from an institutional and commissioning perspective.

The workshop discussions and insights led to the focus of this article, investigating the recent gender discussions in Danish film and television based on analysis of policy documents and industry reports from DFI, SFI and Women in Film and Television Denmark (WIFTD), The European Observatory and UNESCO as well as coverage of the gender debate in the public and industry press in the 2010s. In addition, the article draws on participant observation at industry events such as the launch of the screenwriting manifesto ManusFestet at the Danish Writers' Guild in November 2017 and a masterclass with Dara Marks organized by WIFTD in May 2018.

Gender discussions, data and arguments about quality and inequality

During the course of film industry history, the Scandinavian countries have looked to each other as sources of inspiration in film policy and commissioning frameworks because of the many similarities between the welfare societies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden and similar challenges in terms of how to best structure state support for the arts in small nation markets (e.g. Duelund 2003). New ideas tend to travel quickly across the Scandinavian borders, not least because of a widespread collaboration between the national film institutes, the public service broadcasters and a number of influential Nordic industry organizations such as The Nordic Film and TV Fund and Nordvision as well as the many co-productions that take place in the region.

Since the beginning of the millennium numerous international organizations have turned their attention to gender representation and equality in the arts and culture.

Prominently, UNESCO's 2005 Convention placed the principle of equality as central to human rights, in particular cultural rights, and actively advocated for 'policies and measures that promote gender equality and that recognize and support women as artists and producers of cultural goods and services' (UNESCO 2015: 16). This convention for cultural diversity was ratified by the Danish and Swedish Ministers for Culture in December 2006, and this international agenda informed discussions in Scandinavia.

As argued in the opening line of Maria Edström and Ragnhild Mølster's book *Making Change* with Nordic examples of working towards gender equality in the media, 'sharing good practices is vital' (Edström and Mølster 2014: 8). In terms of gender equality, the Nordic Council of Ministers has a 40-year history of trying to facilitate cooperation in the Nordic region. However, as Edström and Mølster note, there is still a lack of consistent, reliable and comparative data on the gender equality situation in Nordic media (Edström and Mølster 2014: 11). In their book, they highlight the film industry as a front runner in this regard since 'it has support systems that demand monitoring and feedback on gender equality' that they consider useful in other areas of the media industries (Edström and Mølster 2014: 11). In the Danish context, it was a little puzzling that the film industry was hailed as a best practice example. The DFI has provided excellent data on all commissioning decisions and the films and structures in the Danish cinema market for many years, but with no special attention paid to issues of gender. This has primarily been left to interest groups such as WIFTD (founded in 1999), which published its first report on gender imbalance in Danish film and television in 2004 (Schelin and Rowley 2004).

It is remarkable how differently the film institutes in Denmark and Sweden have approached the issue of gender in the new millennium. Writing about Swedish film, professor of gender, organization and management Anna Wahl has outlined how divergent arguments can be used to establish legitimacy and participation when aiming for greater gender equality in an organization or sector such as ‘democracy, fairness, competence, quality, profitability, development or a good working environment’ (2017: 4). Different sectors focus on different arguments. Wahl maintains that, as in many other cultural sectors, the quality argument in Swedish film has come to be predominant in the film industry sector. According to her ‘[t]his is a direct response to the fact that gender equality is often set in juxtaposition to quality: you can have one or the other, but fundamentally they are regarded as being irreconcilable’ (Wahl 2017: 4). As a consequence, actively adopting quality as an argument means that gender discussions are not only about a democratic requirement for fairness and equal terms, but also about a central issue in the film world where quality is regarded as a core value.

Before issues of diversity and equality took centre stage during the negotiations between industry, screen agencies and the Danish government that led to the Danish Film Strategy 2015–19, issues of the lack of diversity and female representation had surfaced but not gained traction in the Danish screen industry. When WIFTD launched the 2004 report with statistics documenting a lack of female filmmakers and female presence on-screen, their main argument was that the numbers pointed to a democratic problem (Ritzau 2004; DR 2004), and subsequent discussion in the Danish media focused on the unfairness of this. The DFI did not seem keen to discuss the findings. The report highlighted a lack of female leadership in the screen agencies and pointed out that during

a period of 30 years there had only been two female feature film commissioners. Head of production and development Lars Feilberg dismissed that criticism as ‘historical’, arguing that two of the three current film commissioners were female and that people should be hired based on their qualifications rather than their gender (in DR 2004). At the National Film School of Denmark, Principal Poul Nesgaard similarly argued that individual qualifications rather than gender were the focus of the selection committee (DR 2014). The debate that WIFTD hoped to initiate with their data seemed to die out quickly and no direct measures followed, since in this context quality and paying special attention to gender equality were regarded as being at odds. Another relevant factor underlying the stalled debate was the widespread view of Danish society as a meritocracy where everyone has equal opportunity to get access to education or funding based on their talent and track record, regardless of other factors such as gender, race or age. Feilberg and Nesgaard’s remarks reflect this understanding, as well as the general perception that filmmakers should be judged on their merits and new projects should be assessed according to quality.

Even though statistics for many years have shown major discrepancies in the number of films made by male and female filmmakers and female representation on-screen, there have been surprisingly few reactions to this until the 2010s. There is a widespread perception of the Scandinavian countries as equal societies and that this equality should be reflected in the screen industry. This assumption was the basis for Edström and Mølster’s research (2014) above, and is also reflected in the international trade press. For example, Ciprani (2017) notes in an article in *Women and Hollywood* that although the country is known for ‘being strong on gender equality’ and for being

‘progressive’, it is yet ‘another disappointing year for female director representation’ in Denmark. In addition to this general societal perception of gender equality and equal opportunities, an industry specific explanation for the lack of gender discussions is also that Denmark has had a number of very successful female filmmakers such as Susanne Bier and Lone Scherfig who have proven that women are in fact able to reach the very top of the profession, making it easier to argue that all well in terms of gender issues in this particular small nation’s film and television culture. As Mette Hjort notes in a consideration of Susanne Bier and gender equity in screen culture, several practitioners in the Danish film and television industries seem to find that ‘far from fuelling a movement towards greater equity, Bier’s success had served to create the impression that policy-style interventions are unnecessary’ (2018: 139).

Moreover, and on an individual level, several female filmmakers have been reluctant to discuss gender issues, since they want to be acknowledged based on their talent and work, regardless of their gender. As an example, Pernille Fischer Christensen has explained that she has often sat down for interviews, explicitly stating that she does not want to discuss being a woman filmmaker (Andersen 2010). Several female filmmakers have also been firmly against any talk of gender quotas for film funding or gatekeepers, and Fischer Christensen has stated that ‘quotas are for fish’ (Andersen 2010: 14). However, by 2018, this picture of the Danish film and television industries had changed to a remarkable degree.

Gender discussions in Swedish film policy in the 2000s

Recent research on gender issues and film policy has highlighted how gender has been a major topic in governance discourses about the Swedish film and television industries

since the early 2000s (e.g. Jansson 2016; Jansson 2017). While Denmark has resisted policy or structural interventions such as, for instance, possible quotas or specific targets for allocating film support based on gender criteria, Sweden has had explicit gender policy targets (as distinct from quotas) since its film strategy from 2006.

Denmark has yet to see a female CEO of the DFI, but SFI has had female CEOs since 2000; Åse Kleveland from 2000 to 2006, followed by Cissi Elwin (2006–10) and Anna Serner (2011–present). According to SFI, the first mention of gender equality in a government bill coincided with the first female CEO, and SFI began keeping statistics on gender distribution in the key positions of screenwriter, producer and director (Jansson 2016: 5–6), pointing to why scholars such as Edström and Mølster have been able to get nuanced data on this topic in Sweden. Gender equality became a started target in the 2006 bill, which also focused on the lack of women in decision-making positions (Jansson 2017: 340).

The statistics showed that there was a gender imbalance in Swedish cinema. In 2000–09 only 19 per cent of all Swedish feature films were directed by a woman. To address this imbalance, the 2006 Swedish film agreement added gender equality as an explicit target and an intention of trying to make female screenwriters, directors and producers represent 40 per cent of film funding (Filmavtal 2006). The numbers showed a slight increase in the years 2007–09, but they were still overall regarded as disappointing (Redvall 2010). A 217-page government report by Mats Svegfors on the future of Swedish cinema recommended that one should continue targeting an equal distribution of support for male and female filmmakers, stating that the lack of women filmmakers was a societal and democratic problem as well as a problem for Swedish cinema (Svegfors

2009: 16). The report encouraged 'diversity' and argued to counter tendencies of 'laziness' and 'standardization', concluding that the continued male dominance in Swedish film is such a tendency (Svegfors 2009: 16).

When Anna Serner became Head of SFI in 2011, she had gender issues firmly on her agenda and described herself as the 'new sheriff in town' (Kang 2016). Not least because of her persistence in discussing gender both on the national and the international film scene, gender became a major topic in Swedish film in the 2010s. A press release from SFI, meant to present SFI initiatives as a success story to international readers, describes Serner as 'a bit of a rock star figure internationally in championing gender equality' with a 'pro-active, no-nonsense approach' (SFI 2015). However, Serner's gender-focused strategies have also been debated, as has the intense focus on diversity, since some industry voices find that this topic is more a policy than an audience concern (e.g. Nam 2015).

There have been many different kinds of initiatives in the Swedish film policy approach to achieve a better gender balance. SFI has thus had a five-point action plan for establishing gender equality with the defined mission to 'meet every argument with an action' (Serner 2016). Rather than only focusing on the allocation of funding, new initiatives have also targeted better visibility of female filmmakers (through web portals such as NordicWomenFilm), mentorship schemes and more focus on talent development programmes with female role models (Medici 2015). Moreover, part of the strategy has been to intensify self-monitoring to make sure there is ongoing awareness of the specific state of affairs and whether there has been concrete change to create better conditions for female filmmakers.

In 2017, SFI published a ‘Gender Equality Report’ as a historical summary with the title *Looking Back and Moving Forward*. In her introduction, Serner concludes that the policy approach undertaken in Sweden has proven that it is possible to ‘achieve a gender equal funding system without quotas, and with higher quality as a result’ and that this has been done through ‘concrete goals and ambitions, along with clear communication’ (SFI 2017). The report traces and discusses the different initiatives in the 2000s and 2010s with the intention of sharing the knowledge gained for the wider good. While these initiatives are analysed and discussed in more detail elsewhere (e.g. Jansson 2016), in the context of this article the most significant factor is SFI’s years of experience working deliberately with gender issues, while DFI only started putting this topic on the agenda in the 2010s.

Diversity as a starting point in the Danish film industry

A 2014 report, *Films for the Future*, put out by DFI prior to the political negotiations of Film Strategy 2015–18, highlighted ‘quality’ and ‘diversity’ as keywords (DFI 2014: 3). The report discussed diversity in terms of geography, noting the on-screen dominance of stories set in the capital of Copenhagen and only limited regional filmmaking (DFI 2014: 19). The question of gender was also specifically addressed, based on new statistics documenting that only one in five Danish directors or screenwriters were women at the time. The report acknowledged that Norway and Sweden had recently made progress in terms of gender equality (DFI 2014: 9), but emphasized that change should not come from quotas that would overemphasize ‘determined representation’ (DFI 2014:19). The main criteria for film funding should still be quality assessments, where the issue of representation is part of the assessment but not a precondition for support. Instead, the

report argues that diversity should be achieved through monitoring and discussing observed inequalities, and change should be encouraged through initiatives that strengthen the education of filmmakers and facilitate new networks for under-represented groups (referring to women and ethnic minorities) (DFI 2014: 19). The formulations of concrete initiatives were thus rather vague, but the report did recognize a need to discuss and address diversity.

The new focus on diversity (*mangfoldighedsindsatsen*) led to the commissioning of several reports on gender as well as ethnicity, social background and geography (DFI 2015, 2016a, 2017a). The 2016 report on gender presented an imbalance, with women directors and screenwriters receiving significantly less public development and production support across genres, especially for feature films, than men (DFI 2016b). At a public debate following the publication of the report in June 2016, several industry representatives called for more concrete measures similar to the targets in Swedish film policy that had helped facilitate change (Dam 2016a). However, the first step decided by DFI in collaboration with a number of prominent industry organizations was to establish three independent 'action groups' that would investigate how to think of diversity from three different perspectives. Head of the Danish Directors Guild Christina Rosendahl was in charge of the working group on how to best follow up on the numbers in the report; screenwriter and board member of the Danish Writers Guild Jenny Lund Madsen headed a work group investigating possible explanations for the under-representation of funding applications from female filmmakers; and Head of the interest organization for Danish cinemas, Kim Pedersen, led a work group on the possible commercial incentives for more films directed by women.

Discussions of structure vs culture: Voluntary ‘soft’ measures rather than ‘hard’ quotas

One of the pressing issues in Danish discussions about gender and film policy has continuously been whether or not to introduce quotas. In 2017, Head of WIFTD Nanna Frank Rasmussen asserted that it was not yet time for ‘radical measures’ such as quotas in Danish film and television (Almbjerg 2017). At the debate following the 2016 gender report, directors Guild Head Rosendahl expressed her understanding of feelings of impatience and called for more concrete measures while emphasizing that, in her opinion, it was better to spend time exploring the challenges to diversity in greater detail and have the industry take part in debates about gender imbalances rather than rushing into top-down decisions from DFI about how to create the needed change (Dam 2016a). At another debate organized by the Stockholm Feminist Film Festival and the Women’s Council in Denmark later in the year, Rosendahl made the case that quotas do not change a production culture. There needs to be broader support in the industry and sincere changes in decision-making processes if fundamental change is to happen (Dam 2016b).

This argument mirrors the research of Anna Wahl, who has been an influential voice in Swedish film policy debates. She argues that studying gender equality means focusing on policy and organizational structures as well as culture (Wahl 2017: 4). Wahl points to how structure and culture are useful analytical tools, even if the terms are closely linked and sometimes hard to tell apart. One can create different structures that can shift the existing balances through initiatives that allocate resources in specific ways to encourage change; however, this does not necessarily lead to a more inclusive culture. If more permanent systemic change is to happen, focus needs to be on creating awareness

as well as on the specific methods to achieve the main objectives (Wahl 2017: 4–5). Much of the research on gender quotas in general establishes that they will inevitably lead to some form of change; the question is what kind of change and whether it has the intended outcome leading to embedded cultural change (e.g. Dahlerup 2010; Franceschet and Piscopo 2013; UNESCO 2015).

Before the recommendations of three gender work groups were announced, the head of DFI from 2007 to 2017, Henrik Bo Nielsen, stated in an interview that change should not be achieved through ‘math and excel sheets’ (Skjolden 2016). Nielsen argued that state regulation was not the way forward and that regulating in this field would not be a ‘Danish thing to do’. His arguments favoured a focus on cultural change rather than structural measures, based on the notion that regulation does not necessarily create a new awareness or a desire to make things move in a different direction. Instead, Nielsen outlined more dialogue between policy-makers, industry organizations and practitioners as the way forward.

Interestingly, Nielsen’s main arguments were no longer about diversity in general or a possible democratic problem in gender imbalances. Rather, he now stressed the quality argument and the possible economic benefits of having a higher female representation. Nielsen made the case that a better gender balance would improve the quality of Danish cinema: ‘Getting more women both in front of and behind the camera can lead to more competition, whereby we can get better films’ (Skjolden 2016). Noting that half of the cinema audience consists of women, he asked rhetorically whether it might not be better for business to have more films with female leads. In 2016, the main arguments from DFI were thus based on an improved gender balance being favourable

for the industry as well as for audiences, since this would improve the quality of the film output and lead to more sales.

When the final reports of the three action groups were publicly presented in November 2016, the first line of the DFI summary from the meeting was that ‘the quota was dead’. Diversity should be achieved by ‘soft, constructive objectives, systemic change and raising awareness through statistics’ (Dam 2016c). Jenny Lund Madsen noted that Denmark had entered the gender ‘battle’ surprisingly late, ‘for being Denmark’, but had faith in ‘a voluntary way’ rather than quotas (Dam 2016c).

Three concrete initiatives were established based on the work of the three action groups (DFI 2017b). The first was a voluntary ‘diversity declaration’ (selvangivelse) when applying for funding, outlining the gender balance in the cast and crew. This was based on an idea by producer Meta Louise Foldager, who originally thought that there was no serious gender issue in her company Meta Film and had been surprised to discover that 93 per cent of all directors and screenwriters on the company’s projects were in fact men. This led her to make gender declarations for all productions, an initiative that was now institutionally embraced on a wider scale. The declaration of gender statistics on specific productions was suggested to accompany all applications to DFI after 1 August 2018 and will be obligatory from the end of 2019.

A second initiative was to launch an investigation of the barriers encountered by directors after graduation from the Danish Film School when trying to break into the industry. The Directors’ Guild made a framework for a qualitative interview analysis conducted by Caroline Livingstone from Film and Media Studies at the University of Copenhagen under the supervision of Professor Mette Hjort (Livingstone 2018).

Livingstone's report was based on interviews with 24 directors who had graduated within the past ten years. It was presented by Rosendahl at a meeting in April 2018 and highlighted a number of gender-related challenges for female directors, including a sense of mistrust and patronizing comments from commissioners during the application process. At the meeting, representatives from DFI addressed this criticism by emphasizing that all commissioners now went through obligatory workshops on how to avoid unconscious bias, arranged by Trine C. Nielsen from the organization Move the Elephant for Inclusiveness. Workshop participants in the room described this as 'rewarding' and 'eye-opening' (Dam 2018).

The third initiative was to organize a number of events on the way audiences experience gender imbalance in Danish film and television. The Writers' Guild and the Actors' Guild announced upcoming master classes, workshops and 'tool kits' for established as well as emerging screenwriters, actors and directors, focusing on clichés and stereotypes. One of these initiatives was ManusFestet, presented by the Writers' Guild in November 2017, which was an attempt to address some of the many gender clichés and stereotypes on-screen in a humorous way.

ManusFestet and using humour to create awareness

ManusFestet is a manifesto created by ten members of the Writers' Guild on gender clichés and stereotypes, written as 40 tongue-in-cheek guidelines for what screenwriters should keep in mind when writing 'films or/achieve funding and TV-series that achieve funding from the Film Institute and the TV-stations and make people feel safe' (see Figure 1 of ManusFestet). The first guideline specifies that writers should remember that female characters should always be sympathetic and young. Otherwise no one wants to

sleep with them – or look at them. The rest of the guidelines continue along these lines as illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

At the launch meeting at the Writers' Guild on 22 November, Jenny Lund Madsen, one of the ten authors, explained that the initiative was intended to start gender debates by looking inwards. All the clichés mentioned in ManusFestet were based on situations or characters that the ten authors had in fact written themselves or observed in the films and series of others. At the launch, all members of the Writers' Guild could receive a poster with the 40 guidelines for free. The ambition was to get the poster up in writers' rooms and on the walls of production companies around the country to make sure that there will constantly be a concrete and visual statement of what to aim for – and not to aim for – in future productions.

While having a satirical approach, the ambition behind ManusFestet was not only to provide some fun food for thought in the gender debate, but to offer a useful tool for writers to make sure that obvious – and perhaps unconscious – choices about storylines and characters are challenged and the object of proper reflection. According to the screenwriting authors at the launch, the 40 guidelines and the conversations during their formulation had already led to changes in their work by raising points that they would not otherwise have considered. Following its publication, other screenwriters have testified to the text actually leading to a new awareness about stereotypes during the writing process. Among them is screenwriter Toke Westmark Steensen, who writes fiction for children and young people, explaining that ManusFestet has in fact provided constructive input for his writers' room conversations for new television episodes (Steensen 2018).

While there is a long tradition for more art-oriented manifestos in the world of film – such as the Dogma 95 Manifesto that also had an element of humour and provocation to its ‘vow of chastity’ (see Hjort and Mackenzie 2003) and other cinema manifestos (MacKenzie 2014) – ManusFestet’s ‘self-help guide’ was not primarily a satirical, political call to arms, but very much intended as a concrete work tool for screenwriters, producers and commissioners.

As a point of comparison, the Bechdel Test offered a simple method for evaluating the portrayal of women on-screen through focusing on whether a film features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than men. ManusFestet aimed at being a resource already during the idea development, screenwriting and commissioning of new films and series, using humour to attract people to read the text, share it and hopefully then act upon it. Whilst the intention of ManusFestet was to add poignant critique and humour to the debate, its focus was on the representation of gender in film and television content and the process of content creation. Given that women screenwriters have always been and still are a minority in Danish film (Redvall 2015), this initiative can also be seen as a symptom of, rather than a solution to the issues of diversity in front of and behind the camera in Danish film.

ManusFestet is one of several examples of soft measures resulting from the work of the gender action groups initiated at the public debate at DFI. Another example of a way to raise awareness and create change through education was the 2018 masterclass with Dara Marks, the author of *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc* (2007), followed by a four-day workshop with Marks and Deb Norton on ‘Engaging the Feminine Heroic’ at the National Film School of Denmark. At the masterclass, the

WIFTD organizers Anne Boukris and Susan Skovgaard opened the programme of the day by stressing the quality argument. As Skovgaard stated, focus should not only be on hard quantitative data, but also be on improving the quality of stories by and about women through learning ‘tools’ from people such as Marks to create strong stories from the perspective of the feminine heroic (Skovgaard 2018).

#TimeUp or a timeframe for change?

Comparing the Danish and Swedish equality debate, this article highlights the importance of an active, embedded, live and critical diversity debate as a driver of change. Both Denmark and Sweden understand themselves and are perceived on the international stage as progressive and equal societies. Compared to many other countries, they of course are. However, this notion that equality is a constant and already there can obfuscate when, in fact, it is not. Denmark in particular prides itself on its *frisind* (tolerance); as a fundamental belief and value, tolerance can muddy the waters when inequality and discriminatory practices actually take place, as observed by, amongst others, the journalist Dorte Nors in relation to the #MeToo debates in 2017 (Nors 2018). This makes it hard to identify and call these practices out. This discrepancy accounts for Jenny Lund Madsen’s astonishment that the gender debate has only recently begun in Denmark as well as Meta Loius Foldager’s surprise when discovering inequality in her own productions. Foldager has since said that she is embarrassed by the fact that she has produced television series where there are essentially no women with speaking parts (Dam 2016b). In 2017 and 2018, Foldager was an influential voice in the Danish #Metoo debates, setting up the website <http://dkmetoo.dk> and organizing a meeting on how to

move from #Metoo to #Wedo in October 2018 (<http://dkmetoo.dk/p/from-metoo-to-wedo--2>).

Recognizing that gender inequality is an issue and acknowledging the need for an informed debate in the first place is of course a precondition for cultural as well as structural change. DFI's former Head Henrik Bo Nielsen acknowledged that a change in culture is needed in Denmark, but also warned that the debate has just begun, that it will be a slow process and that patience is needed even if the rate of progress is 'as flat as the curve of a dying patient' (Almbjerg 2017). Nielsen's statement points to the key point that there is a correlation between temporal lengths and strengths of the gender debates in Sweden and Denmark and the progress made in terms of equality. The numbers speak for themselves. In Sweden gender targets have proven effective and gone some way towards a better gender balance in the screen industries. Sweden is now approximating equality in crew above the line, whereas in Denmark the number of directors receiving support from DFI has been static in the last three years: In 2015 seven of 24 supported feature films had a female director, in 2016 three of 23 and in 2017 seven of 21 (DFI 2016c, 2017c, 2018).

Furthermore, UNESCO's 2015 evaluation of its 2005 convention points out that there is a distinct lack of women in decision-making positions and leadership roles in the arts and creative industries across the globe (UNESCO 2015). Yet, research from both the British Directors' Union and the Writers' Union shows that women in key creative roles (director, producer and scriptwriter) in the United Kingdom and United States employ and work with a more diverse workforce across all departments and therefore implicitly drive equality (Follows et al. 2016: 32–33; Follows and Kreager 2018: 115;

Lazar 2007: 153). The three consecutive Heads of SFI since 2000 are therefore not only an exception to this trend, but also a statement of intent that provides visible leadership from the front. Although measures for diversity in Sweden, for example enshrining targets for equality in the Swedish film agreements since 2006, are structural, ensuring female representation in the leadership, SFI is also facilitating cultural change.

Moreover, an active debate and raised awareness lend more than legitimacy to actions in favour of equality. Maria Jansson argues in her research on gender representation in the Swedish film industry that structural measures as well as the debate itself not only has helped create legitimacy but also prompted women to see equality as a right that is literally beyond debate (Jansson 2017). Conversely, in Denmark equality still needs to be qualified and framed in terms of improving quality. In this context it is noteworthy that #MeToo was readily embraced in Sweden but only reluctantly so in Denmark (Nors 2018). Also, it was the SFI – not the Danish – that threatened to cut funding when sexually charged humiliations inflicted by CEO Peter Aalbæk Jensen at the production company Zentropa came to light in 2017 (Sørensen 2018).

Cliffhangers and concluding remarks

This article demonstrates that while there is an acknowledged need for cultural change in Denmark, there is also scepticism of what is seen as ‘hard’ structural measures. As a result, seeking a balance between hard facts and soft measures seems to be the favoured approach to engender cultural change and gender diversity in the Danish screen industries. As we have seen, this approach is very much constituted through consensus-making driven by institutions, in particular DFI.

Framing the gender debate as strengthening quality as well as equality in the screen industries resonates in both Denmark and Sweden and, on the surface at least, facilitates a constructive debate about quality and inequality. However, this is also problematic. Turning the discussion to quality, merit and quotas can displace the central concerns of the debate and obfuscate the structural and systemic barriers to a successful career that inhibit diversity. The focus on merits, ‘quality’ and ‘improving quality’ that runs through the general debate in the Danish film industry implies that these qualities are lacking in films by and about women, rather than being a structural problem that can be addressed by the very institutions that dominate and shape this debate and maintains the existing hegemony.

The future will show whether soft measures will in fact help change the current gender imbalance in Danish film and television. Amidst the consensus for soft measures, it is worth noting that so far it has been structural measures that have facilitated both the debate and actual change in the Danish film industry. It was DFI’s requirement to monitor equality above and below the line, set out in policy and legislations in Film Strategy 2015–18, that highlighted the state of play in terms of diversity and led to debates and reports on equality within the Danish screen sector. Similarly, Meta Louise Foldager’s concept of gender declarations for her own productions will become obligatory for DFI’s funding applications from 2019. Perhaps further structural measures will be needed if the ‘softer’ approaches prove inadequate. Christina Rosendahl, the Head of the Directors’ Union, has noted that if progress is ineffective and the initiatives do not improve the current numbers, the Union will recommend earmarking 40 per cent of the film funding for each gender in 2025 (Dam 2016c).

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Note

1. The project website describes the workshop series' participants and topics: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/ccpr/researchinccpr/commissioningcreativityandfundingfilmsworkshops2016-17/>.

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