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An independent Scotland could become a film powerhouse

The current independence referendum presents the film-making community in Scotland with an unprecedented opportunity to develop a film culture befitting a modern nation state. They should seize it without hesitation.

That appears to be the dominant position emerging from a series of well-attended industry events exploring the potential impact of independence on filmmaking in Scotland.

It is often stated that Scotland within the UK gets the best of both worlds. But a cursory review of the current state of the country's film production casts significant doubt over the truth of that statement.

Take, for starters, the disconnection between the outstanding quality of the existing and emerging talent base and the paucity of opportunities available. Recent successes include Paul Wright's celebrated debut feature *For Those in Peril*, Jonathan Glazer's adaptation of Michael Faber's novel, *Under the Skin*, and *Sunshine on Leith*, a musical based on The Proclaimers' songs. Yet, despite these achievements, the industry in Scotland stands on shaky financial foundations.

Since the development of the Scottish Production Fund in 1982, film policy has become increasingly devolved. Prior to this, decisions relating to state funding of fictional feature production were made in London. This shift has led to notable successes, but infrastructural support lags significantly behind other countries: Robin MacPherson noted recently that approximately £1 per year person is spent on film in Scotland compared to £2 in Ireland and £10 in Denmark.

The infrastructural lack is perhaps best exemplified by the absence of studio facilities. Although the Scottish government has established a Film Studio Delivery Group and pledged £1m for such a facility, it has been the subject of discussion for at least 70 years. Meanwhile, studios south of the border are struggling to meet demand.

But it isn't just infrastructure that's lacking. The imbalance filters down to education, too. Creative Scotland's Review of the Film Sector in Scotland notes that only 10% of Scottish children receive film education. The figure is 25% in England, 80% in the Republic of Ireland and 81% in Denmark.

It would, of course, be implausible to place all of the problems of film making in Scotland at the door of the Union. But independence creates an opportunity for fresh ideas to emerge. For instance, at a recent discussion on the future of the screen industries, producer Eddie Dick proposed that the 20% VAT on cinema tickets should be set aside for a film production fund, following the example of a similar fund in Sweden. This proposal has been taken up by the newly-formed lobby group Independent Producers Scotland Ltd. The company calculates that this would create a production fund of £23.1m. This is a potentially transformative sum which would place film funding in Scotland on a par with Denmark. It is just this that is the kind of imaginative idea that seems possible in Holyrood but unlikely to be implemented in Westminster.

In 2012, a major public debate over arts policy in Scotland (coined the Creative Scotland stooshie), artists were successful in forcing the Scottish government to state that arts and culture have intrinsic, not simply economic value. The debate exemplified that the closer you are to those in power the greater the chance of influencing policy.

These are exciting times for politics in Scotland. And so they are too for the arts and culture. But nothing is guaranteed. Independence will create the best opportunity to weave together the disparate parts of film culture in Scotland – from film education to film production – and to forge a new integrated film policy which could transform filmmaking in Scotland.