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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Entanglements of feminist activism and gender equality policy in the Spanish and Swedish film industries: between convergence and critique

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ABSTRACT

This article compares entanglements between activist demands and policy in the Spanish and Swedish film industries using a critical frames approach. Considering contextual factors such as domestic discourse on film policy and resistance against gender equality, the comparison is based on deep insider knowledge aiming to deepen the understanding of feminist activism and its relation to policy in the two countries. In both Spain and Sweden, activists have demanded equality in the film sector since the seventies. Today, both countries feature gender equality measures and vivid feminist organizations. Based on current equality policies, reports from the Swedish and Spanish Film Institutes, documents from feminist filmmakers' associations and interviews with activists, the article shows that feminist activists oscillate between strategically converging their demands to policy and criticizing reforms. Furthermore, policy echoes activists' arguments but are less informed by ideas about structural inequalities. Activists in both Spain and Sweden stand up for the gender equality measures which have been implemented, but the Spanish activists are more prone to simultaneously voice criticism against the reforms..

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Introduction

There is a long genealogy of feminist activism within the film industry from the second wave Cinefeminism (Rich, 1998) to well-known fourth wave movements (Munro, 2013) like #metoo, #OscarsSoWhite, and #TimesUp. These various articulations of grievances have increased awareness of structural inequalities in the film sector (Edmond, 2023; Scharff, 2021). Mobilization around so-called 'women's cinema' (White, 2015, p. 17) and demands for better conditions for women working in the industry can hence be characterized as 'a stance of ongoing public activism, rooted in but not limited to gender equity' (Mayer, 2015, p. 20). Parallel to feminist activism, most European countries with public support for domestic film production have introduced policy measures to increase gender equality in the film sector over the last 10 years (EAO, 2019). However, much of gender equality talk has been found to align with neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, featuring 'a current

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of individualism which has replaced almost entirely notions of the social and the political' (Gill, 2007, p. 164; see also McRobbie, 2007).

Research on the development of gender equality policies in European welfare states has highlighted the importance of feminist activism in providing expertise and problem articulation (Hernes, 1987; McBride & Mazur, 2010, 2013; Squires, 2007). This research has shown that the relation between activism and policy is hardly straightforward. Policymakers tend to pick formulations that align with their interests (Hobson, 2003), strip the demands of their radical edge and dismiss structural understandings (Eduards, 2002; Prügl, 2011).

Studies of the film industry as a workplace have reported the persistence of significant gender inequalities (Banks, 2018; Coles & Eikhof, 2021; O'Brien, 2019). Furthermore, gender equality policies in the sector have recently attracted scholarly attention (Liddy, 2020; Liddy & O'Brien, 2021). There is also research on feminist mobilization in the film sector (Galt, 2020; Kamleitner, 2019; Rich, 1998; Ryberg, 2015; Soila, 2019), not least related to #metoo (Boyle, 2019; Marghitu, 2018; Tally, 2021). However, few studies have problematized the connections between feminist activism and the development of gender equality policies in the film sector.

This article seeks to identify and compare patterns of entanglement between activism and gender equality policy in the Spanish and Swedish film sectors. By analysing activist demands and actions as well as in-place gender equality policies, we seek to understand how the two adjust, react, and influence each other with a focus on how problems are articulated, how new issues on the agenda are negotiated and what the reactions to (anti-feminist) critique are.

Spain and Sweden both feature public support for film production and gender equality measures targeting the film sector specifically. Turning to feminist activism, the second-wave movement did not develop in Spain other than as 'clandestine manifestations' (Navarrete et al., 2005, p. 159), due to the Francoist dictatorship. However, today several feminist movements mobilize in the Spanish film sector (Zecchi, 2014). In Sweden, on the other hand, the second wave featured a lot of feminist activism in the film sector, mobilizing women filmmakers domestically and internationally (Ryberg, 2015, 2019; Soila, 2019). Nowadays, such activism is more dispersed, but featuring some important nodes like the organization Women in Film and Television (Wift) Sweden. Both countries have recently implemented the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which among other things, regulate streaming platforms. The Directive provides opportunities for countries to force platforms to contribute to funding domestic audiovisual production, creating a 'porosity' between media and film/cultural policy (Kostovska et al., 2020; Lobato et al., 2023). Spain has recently decided to use this possibility of making platforms contribute to domestic film production, while Sweden decided against it.

An advantage of comparative research is that it makes visible circumstances which may be taken for granted in any specific context (Gómez & Kuronen, 2011; Wendt, 2020). In this article, we are interested in features related to the interactions between feminist activism and gender equality policy. To analyse such entanglements, we have been inspired by critical frames analysis (Lombardo, 2008; Verloo & Lombardo, 2007), which pays attention to how social problems in a specific context can be articulated in different ways. This method draws from social movements theory and policy analysis, which enables relating policy and social movements to each other. A frame is conceptualized as a coherent view on a problem (Lombardo, 2008). We specifically interrogate three elements of such frames: what problems (diagnosis) and solutions (prognosis) are articulated in policy and by feminist activism, and how these articulations conceptualize gender relations. Furthermore, since we are also interested in how the entanglements work in relation to anti-feminist critique, we have added reactions to critique as a fourth element. An initial document analysis enabled us to compare formulations of problems and solutions between the countries but also between policy and activist approaches. Interviews were used to deepen our understandings and collect information not found in documents.

Empirically, the article is based on materials gathered from our previous investigations into gender and the film industry in Spain and Sweden, respectively. The material includes policy

documents from the governments and the Swedish and Spanish Film Institutes (the SFI and the ICAA), documents from the CIMA – Association of Women Filmmakers and from the Audiovisual Media in Spain, Swedish Women's Film Association (SWFA) and Wift Sweden. The discourse on film policy, including the critique against gender equality reforms, has been studied primarily through reports in news media. Interviews with industry stakeholders, including activists and representatives of the SFI and ICAA, were also undertaken.¹

The article is organized in four sections. The first two sections introduce the Swedish and Spanish contexts. The third section presents the analytical comparison, identifying different patterns of entanglement. The last section concludes by discussing three different patterns of entanglement: convergence, critique and non-responsiveness.

Activist demands and Swedish policy

In Sweden, film policy was, from its onset in 1963 until 2017, institutionally separated from cultural policy in general. It was governed through an agreement according to which industry stakeholders and the government contributed with funding to support film production (Jansson, 2016). Central features of Swedish cultural policy, such as citizens' 'right' to culture along with state funding to mitigate market power (de Boise, 2019) can be found also in film policy. In 2017, the agreement model was abandoned in favour of a fully state funded support for film production.

Gender equality measures in the film sector were first introduced in 2000, when equal numbers of women and men in funding committees were required, and gendered statistics were introduced. A goal (quota) to achieve equal numbers of women and men working in the creative teams of state supported film projects was introduced in 2006. Other measures are, for instance, the mentorship program 'Moveiment' (SFI, 2016) and a 'green card' reform (SFI Swedish Film Institute, 2018), demanding producers to participate in a course on how to tackle discrimination and sexual harassment to be eligible for public production support. The latter was an explicit response to the #metoo revelations of sexual harassment in the film industry (Jansson, 2022; Koskinen, 2023). Apart from the actions taken to lessen sexual harassment, the reforms are all framed in terms of the number of women behind the camera, with the solution being a more gender-aware distribution of public funding. The problem is thus conceptualized as there being too few women, hence not mentioning the role of men nor gender relations; however, there is also a frame produced by the Swedish Film Institute, albeit less common, arguing that competent women in the industry are being overlooked in the process of recruiting for creative teams (SFI Swedish Film Institute, 2013).

During the second wave, the Swedish Association of Women in Film (SAWF), active between 1976 and 2003, mobilized women in the film industry. While working with different issues, demands for more women behind the camera became increasingly important over the years. Their overarching frame being that more women behind the camera would lead to films with more nuanced portrayals of women, which in turn would contribute to change society at large (Jansson, 2022). Several of the arguments they put forth were echoed in public policy instigated after the turn of the century. However, while the SAWF articulated the problems in the industry as a symptom of a wider societal structure, policy did not.

In 2001, Women in Film and Television (Wift) Sweden was constituted as the Swedish branch of the international organization. This was about the same time as the first government policies on gender equality in the film sector arose, and Wift have had the opportunity to be part of formal and informal channels between feminist activist organizations and the SFI, such as advisory boards and working groups (Granqvist, interview, 2015). Wift has also seconded the articulation of the problem of inequality as being about too few women behind the camera due to a skewed distribution of funds.

From the beginning, one of Wift Sweden's strategies has been to commission reports from researchers and, in this way, make use of knowledge to highlight gender equality problems (Elf & Oxburgh, interview, 2020). To date, they have funded four reports, issued between 2006 and 2013,

and at least two of them have been referenced in public record reports dealing with film policy (prop, 2012/13:22; DS 2015:31). Similar efforts to make use of academic work have been undertaken by the SFI, for instance by inviting scholars to write in the gender equality reports issued in 2017 and 2021 (SFI Swedish Film Institute, 2017, 2021), and the construction of the site nordicwomeninfilm.com, where academic work is published along with other content forming a gender equality 'hub'. These efforts frame the problem in terms of a lack of knowledge, but they are also used as a tool to articulate the inequalities in the industry.

Wift has also provided opportunities for their members to develop their skills. For instance, online seminars in collaboration with Netflix have been arranged for members to gain information about how to work with streaming platforms.

Discussions in the public sphere about gender equality in the film sector intensified around the mid-2010s (Koskinen, 2023). One of the actions in which Wift was involved was the A-label (Sw: A-märkt) (Koskinen, 2023). The A-label was an initiative to flag films that passed the Bechdel–Wallace test – i.e. contain at least one scene where at least two named female characters talk to each other about something besides men they are romantically involved with. The long-term goal being to enhance a more nuanced portrayal of women on screen.

As a general observation, anti-feminist critique targeting gender equality efforts has been a constant companion to reform, especially the quota which was argued to inevitably lead to the best films never being made. When the success of Swedish gender equality was celebrated in international media around 2015–2016, domestic critique increased (Jansson, 2022). At this point in time, right-wing populism and anti-feminist sentiments had gained traction in Swedish politics, increasingly so after the 2010 elections, when the populist right-wing party Sweden Democrats took seats in the parliament. In that new context, gender equality efforts were framed as 'identity politics' (Nordström, 2015), a term which had increasingly come to acquire negative connotations of illegitimate group interests. After the #metoo-movement and the introduction of the 'green card', i.e. the mandatory anti-discrimination and anti-sexual harassment education, criticism against gender equality took on a new shape described by Maaret Koskinen (2023, p. 78) as accusations of "politicizing" and "instrumentalizing" culture'. As pointed out by Koskinen, much of the critique targeted Anna Serner, then SFI CEO, personally. Nevertheless, it also included a broader revitalization of previously articulated criticism against gender equality efforts (Jansson, 2022). Informed by an emerging 'culture war' rhetoric and fuelled by a report from a government agency in Sweden (Myndigheten för kulturanalys [Authority for cultural analysis], 2021), a new frame emerged describing gender equality work to be in violation of the arm's length principle, and rejected the idea of inequality being a problem. This criticism hence refuted the idea of a 'gender exception' to ensure gender equality in a male dominated film industry, while honouring the idea of a 'cultural exception' allowing state intervention to secure the existence of European film production in the face of competition from Hollywood, or to secure the existence of films in minority languages (Pardo, 2010, p. 430). Counterarguments pointing to remaining inequalities and informing about how the process ensured the arms-length principle by considering gender equality only after having made the quality assessment of the projects, were voiced in vain (Koskinen, 2023). Eventually, this led the Swedish government to delete the formulation of promoting gender equality in the 2022 assignment to the SFI (Swedish Government, 2021).

Activist demands and Spanish policy

The Spanish Film Institute (ICAA), responsible for regulating public funds at a national level, assesses film projects according to a point system, which distributes 100 points across areas such as the artistic value of the project. The first concrete positive actions in Spanish film policy were introduced in 2009, mandating five extra points to be awarded to films featuring a woman director and/or scriptwriter. Since then, the points scale has further increased the incentives to have women as

directors, scriptwriters, producers and/or heads of department. The problem is accordingly framed as there being too few women behind the camera due to lack of resources.

In 2020, a major change in the regulation of public funds allocation introduced a binding quota reserving 35% of the whole ICAA's budget (increased to 40% in 2022) for supporting projects directed by women. Such changes to the criteria for accessing cinema's subsidies have been justified by categorizing films directed by women as 'difficult works'. This allows these films to opt for an increase in public aid of up to 75%, thus creating an exception from the limit of 50% public aid regulated by the EU. 'Difficult audiovisual works' are 'short films, films by first-time and second-time directors, documentaries, or low budget or otherwise commercially difficult works' as defined by each Member State (European Commission [EC], 2013, p.11). By using the label 'difficult works', the aforementioned framing which suggests that lack of economic resources leads to few women behind the camera further indicates that the problem rests with women filmmakers (not) attracting commercial funding for their projects.

After various modifications to the Film Law in 2015, the corresponding Order ECD/2796/2015 for the regulation of the State Aids added, as a requirement for participation, not having been sanctioned for non-compliance with gender equality regulations. And the Royal Decree 1090/2020 stated that, out of a maximum of 50 points in the evaluation criteria, 7 are for gender equality, including 3 points for those films in which at least 40% of the heads of the technical-artistic departments are female. Male co-participation is no longer allowed (except for scriptwriting) to avoid what had become a fraudulent practice of adding a female 'quota name'. As explained by filmmaker Cecilia Ibáñez: after getting the funding, this 'quota' woman would be dismissed or would become an assistant to the man in charge (interview, 2021). While these reforms sought to correct unintended behaviour, they also promoted a 'critical mass' of women behind the camera. This indicates that the problem was not only too few women but also the need for such 'critical mass' on the set for women to be actually in charge.

In 2011, the label 'Especially Recommended for the Promotion of Gender Equality' was implemented in the ICAA's film ratings with the goal of making audiences aware of onscreen gender-equal depictions. The criteria for promotion do not consider the sex of the director, but rather the 'transmission of an equal image of both sexes, without discrimination against any of them', 'the elimination of prejudices, stereotyped images and roles based on sex' and 'the promotion of non-sexist language' (BOE, 2011). The framing of this problem is hence that depictions on screen have an impact on gender equality.

In July 2022, the Spanish government approved a new version of the General Law on Audiovisual Communication (Law 13/2022) and, on NaN Invalid Date, the Spanish Council of Ministers agreed on a preliminary draft of a new Law on Film and Audiovisual Culture. These changes to the legislation are Spanish implementations of the EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive, addressing issues such as the protection of European audiovisual works. But while the new Film Law, yet to be approved, considers gender equality measures, the Audiovisual Law has totally omitted concrete measures to guarantee gender equality (Andreu, 2021).

Gender equality measures in Spanish film policy have been implemented top-down, but their design has been done in dialogue with associations of women film workers. Among these associations, the most visible one is CIMA, which was created in 2006 with two goals: to defend equal opportunities for women in access to decision-making positions in the audiovisual industry and to promote an unbiased image of women in the audiovisual media (París, 2010, p. 350). Hence, CIMA produces a dual frame, the first related to women's presence in the industry and the second emphasizing the importance of how women are portrayed on screen.

More recently, they have organized 'CIMA Impulsa', a mentorship and training program that promotes the development of projects written by women scriptwriters to facilitate their access to the audiovisual industry. This project is designed by CIMA but mainly funded by Netflix, though also with financial support from the ICAA and the NextGenerationEU trust. This project frames the problem in terms of women needing to update their skills to be competitive in the new media environment.

Apart from CIMA, whose scope is national, there are five regional associations of women film workers active in Spain, which demand specific measures from the authorities of Catalonia (Dones Visuals), Andalusia (AAMMA), Murcia (AMMA), Valencia (Dona I Cinema) and the Basque Country (Hemen). In 2018, these associations got together, along with MIA (Women in the Animation Industry), to create the 'Inter-territorial Working Group for Equality in Audiovisual 50/50 by 2025'. The name of the group reflects the impact of the '50/50 by 2020' campaign, launched in 2016 by Anna Serner. Indeed, the major change of policy in 2020, which introduced a quota-like measure, was a demand from these associations. They asked for a quota rather than mere additions to the points system, which they found had no real impact. The number of women directors 'at a national level ... just didn't rise from a 20%' according to filmmaker and president of Dones Visuals, Yolanda Olmos (interview, 2021). Therefore, policy and activism seem to share a frame that relies mainly on the logic of numbers, although they propose different solutions.

This frame is also visible in the reports conducted by Spanish activists in collaboration with academics to produce quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (theory) data to support their arguments for negotiating with institutions. A clear instance of this are CIMA's annual reports of women's presence in the Spanish film industry, carried out since 2015, with funding from the ICAA since 2019. According to the latest report, the percentage of films directed by women and presented for competition at the Goya Prize in 2022 was 24% (Cuenca, 2023).

While CIMA celebrates the implemented gender equality measures, these have also been criticized. Both from an anti-feminist position depicting equality measures as 'aids' for women who seem to lack the skills to succeed by themselves (e.g. Peña in Medina, 2020) and from a feminist position that regards them as insufficient or 'merely cosmetic', as put by the European Women's Audiovisual Network representative, Alexia Muiños (interview, 2021).

Entanglements: a comparative analysis

As described above, Sweden and Spain feature gender equality policies and activism among women film workers. The most common frame embraced by policy and activists is that there are too few women behind the camera and that female filmmakers need better economic conditions. Accordingly, policies pinpoint changes to public funding strategies as the main solution. We call this frame the number logic. Both countries also feature frames related to onscreen representations, implicitly arguing that representations influence society at large. In Spain, this frame is found in policy, while in Sweden, it is promoted by activists. Lack of knowledge about gender equality, and women's need to update their skills in a new media environment provide two additional frames in both countries. In the following subsections, we make a comparative analysis of the different patterns of entanglement between activists and policy found in relation to the frames which we call the number logic (also expanded to intersectionality), onscreen representations, and developing skills.

The number logic

Feminist activist movements in Sweden have framed inequality as a structural problem. The SAWF discussed the conditions in the film industry in terms of 'oppression of women' (SAWF, 1976). The #metoo petition signed by Swedish actresses described the unequal situation in this industry as an expression of an overarching 'gender power structure' (SvD, 2017). However, both the SAWF and the #metoo petition frame their more explicit and concrete demands in less structuralist language. For instance, in a series of letters from the early 1980s, the SAWF demands more equal numbers of women in various positions. These letters are stripped of references to broader structural problems (e.g. SAWF, 1981). The discrepancy between their structural framing of the problem on the one hand, and the solutions presented in their demands on the other, indicate that activists adjust their demands to fit the ideas about

what gender equality policy can be about. This pattern can either be interpreted as activists strategically adjusting their demands to facilitate them being picked up by policymakers or that activists and policymakers share a joint understanding about how reforms should be articulated to fit the agenda.

In Spain, the number logic is intertwined with a frame which represents women as 'assisted and subsidised victims' (Navarrete et al., 2005, p. 161). This problematic frame is found in the label 'difficult audiovisual works', where films led by women are constructed as different and unable to attract commercial funding. This frame has been criticized by feminist activists (e.g. Villaplana, 2008). Although the intention with policy is to amend inequalities, the underlying implications reproduce the idea that profitable films are those made by men, while 'women's cinema' must be subsidized. CIMA's activists have embraced the reform, which provides positive measures for women; nevertheless, they also express concerns regarding the 'stigmatisation' of women filmmakers due to this framing (Olmos, interview, 2021). In this case, CIMA has strategically adjusted their criticism of the articulation of women as marginal by embracing the reform because of its positive effects for women filmmakers.

In the Spanish public debate, there has also been resistance to the 35% quota introduced in 2020. The main anti-feminist voices against this measure have come from extreme right politicians (Zurro, 2022), but some women in the industry have also expressed concerns, for instance, director Gracia Querejeta said she felt 'ashamed of getting more points' than male directors and proposed to limit this measure to debut films (in Medina, 2020). Another comment against these policies is that 'male talent is being lost with the incorporation of women' (Olmos, interview, 2021). However, awarded director Carla Simón explains that 'such male anger only shows fear' since, in the ICAA's evaluation, 'a woman's project with a very low score will never surpass a man's project with many more points' (in Medina, 2020). Frequently, members from CIMA are interviewed in the media, explaining why gender equality measures are so necessary in the Spanish film industry (e.g. Zurro, 2022).

In Sweden too, activists and the SFI have had to deal with critics who deny the existence of structural inequality and therefore frame gender equality efforts as illegitimate at best, and detrimental for the industry at worst. Public rebuttals as well as internal work to answer critical points have demanded a lot of resources from the SFI, according to Serner (interview, 2021; Koskinen, 2023). She also says that, in the eyes of critics, 'whatever you do, everything is wrong' (interview, 2021). In the policy material, there are visible traces that criticism has affected how gender equality is spoken of, as well as how the reforms have been implemented. For instance, the gender equality strategy from 2013 was designed as a Q&A where common 'myths' about gender equality were debunked (SFI Swedish Film Institute, 2013). Wift's work, including dissemination of knowledge and general awareness raising, has supported the SFI's efforts to respond to criticism. Like CIMA in the Spanish case, there are numerous newspaper articles where members from Wift have been interviewed as filmmakers to corroborate the analysis that inequalities still exist in the film industry. This shows a pattern of mutual support and defence of reforms.

After 2017, when the critics succeeded in arguing that gender equality conflicted with the arm's length principle, the formulation about gender equality and diversity was deleted in the instruction to the SFI for 2022. Nevertheless, the demand to report statistics on gender equality remains as does the film policy goal from 2016, stating that gender equality shall inform the policy. Hence, there are still policies to fall back on regarding gender equality, but it was a strong political signal from the government, to indicate that gender equality conflicts with artistic freedom. This statement coincided with Serner stepping down from her tenure as CEO. In this situation, the political message makes it very difficult for a new CEO to continue the proactive work for gender equality. In the wake of this development, the debate about gender equality in the film industry has been muffled. We have found no traces of Wift nor of any decision-maker commenting on the government's deletion of the formulation about gender equality. This reveals a pattern of mutual silence in the face of backlash.

Expanding the number logic?

As highlighted in the previous research, gender equality in the film industry has been occupied with the frame of a lack of (competent) women (Cobb & Williams, 2020). This framing of the problem can be argued to construct gender simply in terms of 'female sex', ignoring men, queer/non-binary and how gender is institutionalized and experienced in the film sector. Further, it has also obscured differences within women.

Intersectionality has been a hot topic among Spanish activists, as exemplified by the creation of the Delegation of Migrant and Racialised Women in the Film Industry within CIMA, in 2021, and their production of a report on the situation of migrant and racialized women in the industry (Marcos & González, 2022). The aim of the Delegation being to provide a space to analyse how we are being represented and to claim what we see as legitimate (...). There would have to be quotas for both migrant and/or racialised professionals, and for projects that contemplate the ethnic and cultural diversity of Spanish society (Ana Alkimim, interview, 2021). CIMA has thus framed intersectionality in a similar mode as gender equality – in terms of numbers and distribution of funds. These efforts haven't impacted film policy. However, the new Spanish Audiovisual Law, traversed by neoliberal ideas, mentions diversity as something that has proved to be good for business. Scholars have argued that such a frame rests on a 'precarious' basis because diversity is subjected to commercial interests and trends (Gray, 2016, p. 248).

In Sweden, Wift dedicated the CARLA Film Festival held in Karlskrona 2020 to intersectionality. Wift, like CIMA, frames intersectionality in a similar way as gender equality, in terms of numbers and visibility. In Swedish policy, diversity was mentioned in the 2013 film agreement, but, unlike gender equality, it was not supported by a quota or any other substantial reform. Constructed as an inclusivity goal, it was framed within the number logic, but without the connection to funding. The SFI's 2021 report, 'Which Women?' (SFI, 2021), focused on this issue. However, the discourse was influenced by a commercial logic: '... diversity and representation have an as-yet-untapped potential in Swedish film, both commercially and qualitatively (...) these groups [old and racialized women] are often made invisible, both in front of the camera and behind it. This, in turn, means that the film industry risks missing out on narratives and talent with the potential to attract new and larger film audiences' (SFI, 2021, p.1). This adds a second framing to intersectionality, where racialized women are constructed as a resource.

The framing of intersectionality thus draws primarily on a numbers-logic in both countries. In policy, intersectionality is articulated as diversity and informed by a commercial logic, whereas activists, and to an extent the SFI, discuss it in terms of structural inequalities. In this case, policy development (in words only) and activist articulation seem to have arisen in parallel, rather than one having been influenced by another.

Gender equality on screen

The only policy in Spain with a frame that focuses on content – the label 'especially recommended for the promotion of gender equality' – is also the only gender-neutral one. This policy was driven by the then Minister of Culture Ángeles González-Sinde, who has been close to CIMA. It is interesting to compare this measure with the Swedish activism around the so-called A-label initiative, which is framed in similar terms as the Spanish reform: promoting less stereotypical gender images on screen. The A-label was an activist endeavour,² involving theatres and the organizations Wift-Sweden and Rättviseförmedlingen, with the goal to impact future filmmaking to portray more complex representations of women (Hagström, 2014).

In the Swedish context, the arms-length principle prevents the SFI from actively promoting specific messages in film, so activists undertook this initiative on their own. The Spanish reform, on the other hand, was made top-down, and Spanish activists have described it as 'merely cosmetic' (Muiños, interview, 2021). However, Spanish activists have tried to reframe the discussion on

contents to be about the budget gap. They have argued that women have to adjust their stories to lower budgets resulting in what is labelled 'women's cinema', characterized by a distinctive interest in 'intimate' stories. The new audiovisual law is indeed operating in this direction, placing funding for films made by women within the 'independent cinema' box. What activists claim is that women are being forced to make 'small' films because of the precarity they face in the industry (Zecchi, 2014, p. 124). Nevertheless, some women directors also vindicate the validity of this type of film (Calderón & Jansson, 2022).

In Sweden, the gender budget gap and women often making children's films and documentaries have been discussed by activists since the 1970s. The problem has also been addressed in the policy domain. Especially after the introduction of a reform granting automatic public funding to high-budget films in 2013, the SFI, then headed by Serner, pointed out how this benefited men. This led to activities and bids to promote women as directors of high-budget productions (SFI, 2016), and to roll back the automatic support in 2017. Framing the problem as a lack of women in high-budget productions, the efforts increased the number of women working in such films, thus decreasing the budget gap statistically (SFI, 2018). However, as noted by women film directors and producers, high-budget films are often made with rather strict demands on formats and content, as they often feature 'circumscribed artistic control and lesser possibilities to break conventions' (Lafrenz & Spång, interview, 2018).

Comparing the policy choices in Spain and Sweden, it is interesting to note that Spanish policy promotes women to do low-budget films with 'women's' content, while Swedish policy encourages women to adjust to what is considered commercially viable. At the intersection of the frames focusing on content and budget, Swedish activists have engaged in promoting more nuanced depictions on screen, while the SFI has addressed the budget gap. In Spain, the situation is the other way around. The government promotes gender equal content, while activists try to attract attention to the budget gap.

This section has revealed top-down and bottom-up patterns of entanglement between activists and policy. The context, such as the Swedish discourse on the arms-length principle and the impact of politicians with strong commitments in Spain, contributes to the different interconnections between policy and activism.

Developing new skills

Platformisation has led to film policy being intertwined with media policy (Kostovska et al., 2020; Lobato, 2019; Lotz, 2019). As media and film policies continue to exist side by side, it is difficult to assess how this will affect gender equality work in the film sector. Spanish activists have framed the new situation as a problem of reaching audiences, while Swedish activists have been rather silent on this matter. However, both CIMA and Wift Sweden have collaborated with platform providers like Netflix, to improve their members possibilities to work in this segment of the industry.

Recent developments in Spain have actualized the intersection of film and audiovisual policy. The new film law, dependent on the Ministry of Culture and still under revision, incorporates positive actions including gender quotas, but the new audiovisual law, which is more comprehensive and dependent on the Ministry of Economy, only mentions general recommendations and neglects any concrete gender equality measures. According to Nieves Maroto, from CIMA, this differentiation speaks of the glass ceiling that women keep on encountering when it comes to budget decisions: it is as if women cannot be 'where billions are truly talked about' (interview, 2022). Cristina Andreu (2021), president of CIMA, has denounced that CIMA's demand for a 40% quota for the broadcasting of films and series directed by women was ignored. CIMA also complained that the required investments by streaming platforms reduced funding obligations for women-directed films to 30% of investment in independent films, therefore excluding women from mainstream productions. Hence, Spanish activists point out the risk for gender equality backsliding as the audiovisual media legislation does not converge to the (hard won) progress in terms of gender equality measures in film policy.

In Sweden, legislation regulating platforms is inserted in media policy, where market conditions are first and foremost considered (Prop., 2019/20:168). The Swedish legislation also features a much

stricter separation between media and film policy: no requirement for platforms to contribute to domestic production, and the SFI is not allowed to finance the production of TV-series (SFS 2016:989). In this context, Swedish activists seem, for now, to have accepted the fact that while film policy includes gender equality efforts, the regulation of streaming platforms leaves all such considerations to the market.

The pattern of entanglement developed within this frame in Spain consists of criticism along with proactive elements on behalf of activists. In Sweden, where platform policy and film policy are organized as separate fields with strict boundaries, activists have refrained from criticism but still engage in activities to support their members.

Concluding remarks

This article set out to investigate entanglements between activism and policy in the Spanish and Swedish film sectors, through a critical frames approach. The analysis shows that, to a large extent, the frames in the two countries overlap and deal with gender equality in terms of using public funding to increase the number of women and to expand knowledge about gender equality. Frames pointing to the importance of non-sexist onscreen portrayals and developing skills to survive in the new media landscape were also found. The general discourse on film policy differs in the two countries. First, in Sweden, the arms-length principle has been argued to conflict with gender equality. Second, while Spain has included gender equality in its regulation of streaming platforms, Sweden has not. In this section, we deliberate on three different patterns of entanglement between activists and policy: convergence, critique and (non)-responsiveness. These patterns also reveal some deep-rooted features of the two countries which we, in our respective studies, had taken for granted.

Feminist activists in both countries have been shown to converge their demands with what they believe is reasonable policy, even if this means compromising on their analysis. Activist frames in both countries stress structural inequalities to a larger extent than policies do. We have found that activists have adjusted their demands, but also that they actively engage in defending reforms. The latter is especially visible in Sweden, where not even the government's deletion of gender equality in their assignment to the SFI was publicly criticized. In Spain, activists have instead combined embracing reforms while simultaneously criticizing them.

Critique refers to how feminist activists try to influence policy to be modified by pointing out problems or lack of intended effects. Apart from the discussions on the 'automatic funding' in Sweden, where activists joined in Serner's open criticism against the reform, this form of entanglement is more frequent in Spain. Spanish activists have criticized the 'difficult works' reform for how it constructs women. They have argued that the label 'especially recommended' is 'cosmetic' and hides the fact that women are forced to produce certain content due to lack of funding. Further, they have criticized the evaluation system for not leading to intended results. The fact that this form of immanent criticism is not found to the same extent in Sweden may be because such criticism is not channelled publicly but rather presented at internal meetings and not traceable in our material. However, if so, it would still support the overall impression that Swedish feminist activists are more integrated in the gender equality policy arena, compared to Spanish activists.

The design of gender equality policies in both countries echoes arguments and ideas articulated by feminist activists. Further, interpersonal connections, such as those between CIMA and the then Spanish minister of culture, and the committees and working groups in Sweden indicate channels for policy response to demands. However, the responsiveness in terms of changes in implemented policies or adding of new measures seems to be limited. For example, the evaluation system with points remains in Spain, despite CIMA's critique. Moreover, aspects such as the diversity/intersectionality issues have basically only been picked up on within a commercial framework.

To conclude, we find that activist frames are found in policy, albeit often somewhat altered. The analysis shows that there seems to be a consensus between activists and policymakers regarding what is appropriate problem articulation on the policy arena. Activists are more likely to converge

their demands to the requirements of policy-making, than policymakers are to implement demands from activists. A difference between Spain and Sweden is that Spanish activists are more prone to express immanent criticism. However, overall, activists support and defend implemented gender equality policies.

Notes

1. The interviews were conducted by the authors in Spain and in Sweden respectively. The Swedish interviews were undertaken in collaboration with NN. Interviews with Spanish filmmakers were carried out via Zoom. The interviewees were provided information about the research, and they stated that they participated freely and with consent. The interviews were recorded. The participants have had the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interviews, as well as the article manuscript. All translations of quotes from interviews have been done by the authors. Sweden: According to Swedish legislation (SFS 2003: 460), the interviews do not include any sensitive personal information and are therefore exempt from the formal ethical vetting procedure. However, the research follows the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2023) and the Swedish Research Council's instructions for Good Research Practice (2017). Data is stored according to Swedish legislation and in accordance with GDPR (EU 2016/679). Spain: The research procedure complies with the requirements established by the University of Granada Research Ethics Committee, as well as by the Spanish Organic Law 3/2018 of December 5 on Protection of Personal Data and Guarantee of Digital Rights.
2. An organization whose aim is to match employers with job seekers from a more diverse population.

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