

Annual Report 2018

FLH – ICELAND

FLH currently has 121 members – screenwriters and playwrights. We have no staff and all work and activities falls mostly on the hands of members of the board, which consists of five volunteers, all active screenwriters/playwrights. Some tasks are also delegated to eager and willing members.

Since the guilds only source of income is the membership fees and all work is volontaire our activities are somewhat limited accordingly. Although we do our best it sometimes feels as if we're the fire brigade of a small town – consisting of the barber, the school-bus driver, the church organist and so forth... But as long as we manage to keep the fire away we're OK.

Agreements and Contracts

We have finally come to realize that the Producers' Association has absolutely no plans to come to any agreement with us. This is not limited to screenwriters, the directors and even the actors are in the same situation. Therefore we've joined hands with the Writers' Union (book authors) and the Directors Association, since in both organizations there are quite a few screenwriters, and we are now in the process of putting together unilateral writers' contracts for films and TV series which our members can then bring to the table when negotiating.

Up until now, the tradition has been that the producers present the writers with a contract. The most common one, which most of the production companies use, is a total buy out contract with numerous hostile clauses. So almost every negotiation starts with the tedious and painful procedure of debate and revision of the document. Usually the writer manages to get some amendments through but on the next project, even with the same producer, the bad old contract is back again. So nothing sticks and nothing improves.

For reference, for our desired contract, we are looking towards our friends and neighbours in the other nordic countries, especially the Danish, since their contracts are pretty close to perfect. We can not include any figures or tariffs because of the competition law but we have plans to spread the word and promote an underground minimal fee tariff. Yes, our working conditions have become so unacceptable that we are willing to use all the dirty tricks in order to improve them.

Negotiations with RÚV – The National Broadcaster

To our pleasant surprize, RÚV called us in for a meeting and asked us to assist them in forming a standard contract for writers. For years we've been trying to get them into talks, so it was indeed unexpected. Since RÚV outsources most of its production to independent production companies it's very rare that negotiations are between RÚV and the writers. But now they have plans to produce, semi-inhouse, some smaller scale TV dramas – low budget mini series with limited cast, few locations etc. They plan to send out an open call for ideas of such a material. Even though we know the fees are going to be limited accordingly we see

it as an opportunity to lay grounds for the main standard contract that would follow, and apart from the fees we can secure rights and fair share and so on.

Also this could be groundbreaking in bringing more power to the writer since RÚV's idea is that the development will start between the network and the writer/creator and only at later stages a production company will come in for the execution.

Another important thing would be if we could bring about that when a TV series is being produced for RÚV the contract between RÚV and the writers could not be bypassed. Still we are moderately optimistic since things tend to move very slowly with our national broadcaster.

Film politics

Although Iceland's economy has now mostly been resurrected after the economic crash in 2008 (by the way we are "celebrating" its 10th birthday!) our Film Fund has been left behind and kept very meek. In spite of heavy lobbying on the part of all the entities of the film industry there just seems to be very little progress and each new year the state budget is a disappointment. At the same time Icelandic films and TV drama are doing better than ever before, with international distribution and being nominated and winning awards all over the world. But the state of the film fund means that we are in a way limited to a certain type of stories and everything is low budget. We can for example not do any epic or periodic dramas.

Only 18% of the Film Fund goes into TV drama series, which means the maximum of 2 series per year get funding. But since the fund is so small and everyone is starving there is a consensus not to demand that a higher percentage of the fund goes into TV, but instead to try to sell the authorities the idea to create a new investment fund especially for TV series and leave the Film Fund to films and documentaries.

The Icelandic Film Council, whose function is to advise the Ministry of Culture and Education on film matters, and the Film Institute, have been asked to take on the task together with the Ministry, to revise and update drafts of changes to the film law, but since the changes to the law has dragged on for 3-4 years a large part of the work that was done is already obsolete. Another task that awaits the Film Council is to make recommendations for a new Film Policy since the current one expires in 2019. Hopefully this will open up a new and more effective dialogue between the film making community and the authorities, and lead to some improvements in the field.

Netflix

Rumor has it that Netflix has started sniffing around in Iceland, although nothing we know of has come out of it yet. What we have noticed though is that many producers seem to be looking longingly in that direction. And what we absolutely want to prevent is that they try to use us the writers as a bait of cheap labour, we just know their mindset all too well.