

# Script-Development in Germany

- a short review

by René Odenthal MA

*The author is member of the managing-board of the german association for dramaturgs for film and tv (VeDra), freelancing dramaturg and script-consultant with background as author for TV, radio and printmedias and theatre-director.*

Looking on the german filmindustry in 2003 it is remarkable, that € 230.000000 were spent from different state-funds, boards and subsidisers for the development, production and distribution of movies for cinema and TV.

The extent of the production of feature-films in 2003 was appr. 100 films and appr. 300 TV-movies, (but not all these films have been subsidised). The different boards are subject of budget of the regions (countries) of the German federal republic and get contributions from TV-stations (public and private). The state-secretary for arts and medias (BKM) is part of the central government and in so far subject of the national budget. The federal filmboard FFA gets 1,5% to 2,5% from the turnover of every cinema.

**Only 0,53% to 2% of the whole amount is spent for writing and developing of filmscripts.**

This shows the small emphasis that the boards still put on script-production and script-development (for example: the Bavarian FFG spent on scripts 0,53% (!) of ist total funding and the national Filmboard (FFA) gave 2% only of its budget to scriptwriting and development).

Some money is given for credit without any interest, sometimes funding is only possible if a producer declares his intention to produce a film on the script, further partitions are possible when a producer spends own money to develop a treatment or exposé.

You have to know, that the capital and investment-rate of german filmproducers is very low. Most of them are small enterprises, they hire freelancing personel only in times of production, and they are sometimes not able to spent venture-capital for developing a script, which is probably difficile to produce and to merchandise...

## That was the money-talk, let's look at the content

Against all obstacles some German films get good remarks and better reviews in the current time, even internationally. That is due among others to long lasting efforts in training and developing producers, directors, screenwriters and last but not least dramaturgs and script-consultants.

Nevertheless the share of German films in the national filmmarket is almost lower than 15%!

## In Germany the professional development of scripts is not yet usual

- Authors are often hired for only small money to sketch an Exposé, although they invest their creativity on this level for the most
- For too long they work on treatments, because a first draft cannot be financed before a commission is made by TV-stations
- Experienced authors tend not to write for cinema, because more extensive labour is necessary but not paid equivalently
- Editors or producers, engaged in lots of other duties, even trainees have to discuss with the authors often with a lack of effective skills and experiences.
- External dramaturges are hardly contracted to overview the whole development of a project. At least they are asked when a blockade occurs or when facing serious problems and the shooting is already scheduled

These are some facts of the actual situation, that base on an exploration of our association of German dramaturgs for film and television (VeDra). Deeper insight is provided by a study of Kunstsalon Köln, 2002<sup>1</sup>

Sheer irony and though not citable: In the USA they develop 100 scripts to shooting-drafts and then choose 10 for production. In Germany they ask for 100 pitches, contract 10 for an exposé, get subsidies for 5, shoot 1 at least.

## But there are even some good models:

Since last year the state-secretary of arts and medias (BKM) formed a drama-department, for the tutoring of all authors. The funding includes the fee for dramaturgical cooperation as the usual way of development. Qualified dramaturgs steer the challenging attempt.

---

<sup>1</sup>Arne Birkenstock: Autoren- und Drehbuchförderung in Deutschland, eine Studie des KunstSalons Köln im Auftrag der Staatskanzlei NRW, Köln 2002, <[www.kunstsalon.de/](http://www.kunstsalon.de/)>

In May 2004, the MFG (the filmboard of Baden-Württemberg) enroled new rules for the funding of film-scripts. The regulations include a specification of the authors's skills and experiences, a remarcable increase of the amount of money and advices for the cooperation with dramaturgs.

This hopefully shows a small but good tendency, our association (VeDra) is up to discuss similar plans with other filmboards and funding-organisations in Germany.

Some private and state-funded organisations developed programs for the script-tutoring. So is „step-by-step“ by *master-school* in Berlin for expirienced authors and producers, „talents 2004“ by *nordmedia* for young authors or the *Schreibschule* of *International Film School* in Cologne mostly for TV-needs. Although some of recent recipients of german script-awards have been trained by those programs, the results have to be evaluated. We cannot but remark, that especially young authors are not able to output a script in the sceduled time. Experienced authors do not join these programs normally.

Nevertheless a very trustfull relation is necessary in the cooperation between author and dramaturg, and this is the same for young authors as for the more expirienced ones. The more experienced dramaturgs we have, the more producers, authors and directors can hear about successfull cooperations in the field. A fundamental training existed for dramaturgs in the GDR and is sceduled today still at the film-university in Potsdam, *HFF Konrad Wolf. Master Scool Drehbuch* offers a script-consultant-training based on workshops and online-tutoring.

A market for film-dramaturgy, script-consultants or what else it is named, is known in Germany only since 10 years. But this has not yet evolved a recognition. As long as the education is up to privat organisations there is no regular evaluation of the program and its contents. Many teachers travel all around Europe and teach the methods drawn from reputeded US-american professionals.

**Art depends on diversification for to reflect human life and fantasy!**

Like in the training of screenwriters the time has come, to go beyond structur and rules, formed for the „all-american-three-act-plot-driven“ narrations. You have to master the rules, for to go beyond for the sake of stories, scripts, film-narrations, that have to be told in their own way, based on the aethetics of the various cultural traditions and tendencies.

For the near future following demands are crucial in Germany:

- Authors should apply for funding without any producer if a dramaturgical cooperation is proven. This is useful up to a later draft, when the involvement of a producer is necessary.
- Script-funders should cooperate across the regions. Authors, developers, producers and directors act nationwide. Any regional preferences have to be refused.
- International cooperations for script-development on real projects should be included in european funding programs.
- Initiatives for the common training and formation of authors, producers and dramaturges should be enroled on various scales.

Before conclusion I want to emphasize, that development in film is not only in question for the filmmakers, but for the public also. When we demand to consider the audience from the beginning of the development of a filmproject, we have to admit, that there are very different filmgoers. Statistics in Germany tell, that there is big chance to reach people over 40 years of age, because they are bored at the TVscreen.

For to get better attention and bigger sales at the ticket-counters we have to develop the audience too. Initiatives in France, Britain and Sweden should be taken for good example and as a model.

Understanding films, regarding moving pictures is a social skill, which has to be taught generally in all schools as a basic qualification in our picture-orientated era. This competence must be trained for the sake of good films and its particular consumers, but growing again filmartist too.

We have to face that most of the US-films are made for a public between 14 and 29 years of age. This part of the population is very mobile and fast affected by the commercials. They can bring back the investment in the first 2 or 4 weekends after the first screening. When this is the aim of a production, you have to tell a simple-narrated story, with a hero with whome the youngsters can identify, more action-driven than character-orientated and after some obstacles a happy-ending love story included (or you construct a sheer action-movie).

But this is not the overall issue for all films, wether in Europe nor in the USA, nor in other parts of the world. Many great movies earned their money in the long running, and they are part of a vivant culture. A more fastidious audience needs more film-narrative skills, more reflectious content, more demanding figures, more dramaturgical finesse etc. And that can be developed!