IRISH JOURNAL OF ARTS MANAGEMENT & CULTURAL POLICY

ijamcp

ISSN: 2009-6208 (Online). Journal homepage: https://culturalpolicy.ie/

Foreign Direct Investment and the facilitation of circulation in Irish film production policy

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To cite this article:

Brodie, Patrick (2024). Foreign Direct Investment and the facilitation of circulation in Irish film production policy, *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy,* 10 (2), 82-99

Published online:

July 2024

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Abstract

This article argues that the ‘facilitation of circulation’ has come to shape Irish film industry policy, reflecting on correlations and developments across Screen Ireland and inward-investment agencies such as IDA Ireland. The financialisation of the media industries, along with structural changes in global film economies, has significant implications for workers and industrial formations on-the-ground in given places, nations, and regions. In treating film products as another commodity to be produced in a global assembly line, Screen Ireland has absorbed the industrial logics of what Kay Dickinson refers to as ‘supply chain cinema’ (2024). This article builds a political economic framework for analysing these transformations through a reflection on the Section 481 as an instantiation of their logics, brushing against the grain of mainstream media policy discourses towards a left critique of inward-investment-based screen policy.

Keywords: film policy; screen industries; financialisation; supply chains

Foreign Direct Investment and the facilitation of circulation in Irish film production policy

In Ireland, production policies and infrastructures across various industrial sectors are structured by tax regimes and intellectual property regulations, which facilitate industrial capital circulating through the country. National territorial economic policy frameworks, characteristic of globalisation and the architecture of supply chain capitalism (see Ong, 2006; Tsing, 2009), are a major organising factor within the structure and distribution of media supply chains consisting of industrial infrastructures, labour pools, skills training programs, technologies, partnerships, and regional markets as well as different segments of the production process from pre- to post-production (see Dickinson, 2024). Big media and technology companies, by organising their operations across markets and territories and structuring their operations via competitive and overlapping policies and frameworks, produce value not only through ‘content’ increasingly aligned with shifts in digital platforms and technologies, but via the more efficient management of the circulation of commodities, labour, talent, skills, and finance within these regimes.

Media industry studies has traditionally focused on discrete spheres of ‘production’ (see Mayer, 2011; 2017; Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, 2009) and ‘distribution’ (see Curtin, Holt, and Sanson, 2014; Lobato, 2012; Perren, 2013) as primary industrial formations, which interface but act as different points along a continuous—but progressive and largely unidirectional—media supply chain. This article will trouble this progressive understanding by articulating how finance and logistics organise multi-sited and multidirectional networks of accumulation through media capital,

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which has effects along all links in media supply chains and the territories they cross. Drawing on political economic approaches to financialisation and the circulation of capital to articulate a left position towards film production finance and industrial policy in Ireland, this article will not necessarily identify alternatives, but rather introduce what I see as a timely critique from the left of the common-sensical application of foreign direct investment (FDI)-driven models of development into the film industry in Ireland. While this is not novel, and foreign investment has arguably been a parallel motivator behind much film policy since the establishment of Ardmore Studios as a 'Hollywood-style' operation and outpost for British and American industries in the late-1950s (see Barton 2004, p. 76-82), its association with a wider logic of economic development and integration with networks of financialisation has been less comprehensively studied. The common questions about jobs and skills-training via investment, while crucial, will only form the backdrop of this particular line of critique (see also O'Brien et al., 2021). Undoubtedly, even short-term jobs are important in the cultural industries, and the build-up of film infrastructure, professionalisation, and skills via these investment schemes is a key manner in which small national and regional film industries survive (see Mayer, 2017), and policymakers are reluctant to politicise these measures due to their frequent unpopularity amongst conservative politicians opposed to public spending (see Morton, 2019, p. 208-223). However, the question about the viability of these policies can and should not be about measurable economic benefits, as inevitably that puts policy organisations on the back foot in justifying the existence of public support for culture and assumes the continuity of these investment-based structures. Rather, we should be asking: Why has film and its workers become so devalued within public spending that its only long-term viability is through multinational investment? And what are the long-term consequences of this dependence for the sector and its workers, especially if the markets shift and these flows of capital stop? With the 2022-2023 labour turbulence in Hollywood as a result of industry restructuring in the images of speculative finance capital, these questions become even more urgent for a territory like Ireland. Not only to consider what Ireland is vulnerable to in the case of industry turmoil, but what forms of global exploitation the state is enabling by facilitating offshored global production and post-production in the country's borders.

Expanding on the work of critical media industry scholars like Charles Acland (2020), Hye Jean Chung (2018), Michael Curtin (2016), Kay Dickinson (2024), and Aphra Kerr (2014), who variously analyse the global political economic formations of media supply chains, this article argues that the collapsing of culture within regimes of tax, knowledge, and capital accumulation requires close attention to the organisation and management of capital flows via media production across borders. In particular, it requires a close discourse and policy analysis of Irish state attitudes towards film industries and the benefits (and capital) they provide to the Irish workforce and exchequer. By looking at changes in Irish screen industries policy from the 2007-2008 financial crisis to 2020 within a situated history of FDI-driven strategies in Ireland, I will conceptualise *the facilitation of circulation* through Irish media industries to better understand how Ireland's film

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policies are situated within a global production marketplace beholden to immensely powerful flows of media capital.

Global Production and the Irish Film Industry

Ireland's rapid globalisation in the 1990s through a series of deregulatory fiscal policies and strategic zoning mechanisms has inextricably tied Ireland's fortunes to the vagaries of global markets. But the history of flexible production in Ireland, and the tying of developmental strategies to global markets and investment, have much longer histories than is often accredited, demonstrating deeper developmental attitudes of the Irish state towards its territory and workers since the liberalising industrial measures of the mid-twentieth century. As I have argued elsewhere, this has major implications for media industries and economies in Ireland (see Brodie, 2020; 2021), and indicates that discussion of media policy here needs to be more directly tied to these developmental strategies—especially considering that the Irish Film Board (IFB)/Screen Ireland is commonly referred to as a state 'development agency'. As Denis Murphy (2022, p. 245) notes about film labour disputes at Ardmore Studios in the 1960s,

> That these events took place in the early 1960s demonstrates the international film industry's early adoption of a globalised production model dependent on flexible local labour, some decades before the 1980s-era technological and (de)regulatory developments often associated with the globalisation framework.

The attraction of multinational capital to support industrial activity runs deep in Ireland, in film and in the broader economy, through partnerships between the state and capital and transformations in dependency across historical eras. The creation of burgeoning sovereign systems in the early days of the Republic of Ireland in the mid-twentieth century, from industry to infrastructure, was gradually replaced by a strategy of incentivised global investment which began to permeate through many sectors and intensify in the form of strategic development priorities from the 1970s-1980s, largely in manufacturing (see O'Hearn, 2000; Ó Riain, 2000). In this environment of transformed dependency, Ireland needed to be agile and adaptive to global shifts, including towards the later need for services in the 1990s, which began to supplant the heavy industry that had come here from the 1960s-1980s. But in the form of these FDI-driven industrial policies, production was always-already tied to an export-led model, as the transnational circulation of (tax-averse) multinational capital through Ireland structured the industrial production that was located here.

The forms of differential sovereignty and governance introduced through these territorial economic strategies allowed for differential treatment of space (and labour) for particular kinds of productive activity (see Ong, 2006). Ireland was an early adopter and innovator in these strategies, for example with the establishment of tax-free and tax-reduced special economic areas like Shannon (late-1950s) and the International Financial Services Centre (1987), whose later nation-wide iterations in part led to extreme growth in the 1990s (as well as a proportionally extreme crash in

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2007-2008) (MacLaran and Kelly, 2014). Ireland's comparatively low wages, which rose over time, were supplanted by tax advantages and the 'English-speaking workforce' which became a larger and larger mode of employment, as companies' customer, financial, and tech services would stay even as manufacturing operations migrated elsewhere (O'Hearn, 2000). In 2003, Ireland flattened its countrywide tax rate to 12.5%—the lowest in 'industrialised' Europe at the time, and a rate that will not be significantly affected by the 2024 EU minimum corporate taxation floor of 15%.

For now, we should begin to think about the implications of these tax mechanisms for Irish labour when localised industries become dependent upon the global success of these companies. A 2023 film industry report found that the Section 481 tax scheme, the primary inward-investment mechanism for the film industry, was by far the main reason global productions chose Ireland, with 67% of respondents listing it as the primary factor (Olsberg SPI, 2023, p. 4). Across the board, Ireland's tax strategies are essential tools for keeping businesses in Ireland, and thus for securing employment at a population scale. Primarily, scholars and activists have focused on the tech (and financial and pharmaceutical) industries when critically analysing tax strategies. With varying levels of Irish state support, mostly US multinationals are offered exceptional spaces and incentives for their offshore operations, as companies are lured to Irish shores by these low tax rates and loopholes through intellectual property (IP) and research and development (R&D). Noticing competing territorial capitalisms under globalisation, Marxist geographer David Harvey argues that far from smoothing out the world, countries and regions end up competing with one another for flows of global investment (see 2005). In film industries, the prevalence of bidding and its supposed fostering of 'competition and innovation' based on project-logic which dominates the actual film industry has facilitated at the ground-level 'a globalisation of production and the implementation of a race-to-the-bottom' (Curtin, 2016, p. 677), which has expanded territorially to encompass entire nations and regions bidding against one another. The soft power of nation-state cultural diplomacy becomes not a struggle for territory but a competition for private transnational capital, with workers and small companies caught in the crossfire between state mediators (whatever internal differentiations there might be amongst agencies and Government) and place-averse flows of investment (see also McCabe, 2020).

But what Ireland's policy of facilitating the immensely profitable flows of multinational capital functionally does is inflate economic prosperity metrics across the board (Honohan, 2021)—however much its scale and positive effect on GDP are frequently held up as key to Ireland's economic successes. This is so institutionalised at various layers of the state that it has been referred to as 'sacrosanct' by a Minister in 2012, and successive Governments have mobilised to protect it even against EU regulation (McCabe, 2020). Thus, we should emphasise the significant role of the Irish state and its economic policies in facilitating this investment environment—and its consequences. This apparently subservient relation to global capital does not (necessarily) represent the Irish state's 'weakness' or lack of control in the face of global economic forces. Rather, what I want to emphasise is that the state, and the associated institutions upholding the economic common-sense of growth (whatever internal differentiations on policy and allocation

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there might be), has a major role to play in its very contractual relationship with capital. Without the state's role in facilitating corporate landing in Ireland via the 'contact sport' of FDI (Irwin-Hunt, 2020) through powerful semi-state institutions like IDA Ireland (f.k.a. the Industrial Development Authority) as well as ostensibly public cultural institutions like SI, whether through tax incentives or direct support, these mechanisms would not work. From an industry governance perspective, state institutions understand how crucial it is to facilitate this circulation of tax-averse capital to secure jobs and investment, however much the benefits of this strategy are beholden to impersonal multinational profit motives and fluctuating market circumstances.

Media Financialisation

While this article is focused on high-level activities like policy, finance, and logistics, ostensibly at the level of governance and global corporate strategies, I want to emphasise that these dynamics are inescapably and essentially spatial. They are about the circulation of capital through space, and frequently about the ideological untethering of the "market" from its physical manifestations within and across territories. Many critics have analysed these apparently immaterial dynamics of marketisation as 'financialisation,' or the spread of financial rationalities across territories and into all corners of life and governance (see Haiven, 2014). However, sometimes the practical implications of financialisation—a social process emerging from a shadowy realm of bankers' immaterial trades, swaps, and manoeuvres (see Ho 2009; LiPuma 2017)—can appear as abstract as financial processes themselves, at least in the sense that financialisation 'permeates' society like an atmospheric force, invading areas of previously shielded cultural activity with its market-based rationalities and practices (Poell et al., 2021). When Screen Ireland contracts its reporting to external organisations to measure the measurable 'cultural dividend' offered by the Section 481, even media scholars supportive of these schemes should take a step back and think about the ways that financial logics dictate language (and practice) of cultural policy.

Thus the 'culture of financial circulation' (Lee and LiPuma, 2002) which imagines cultural (among other) workers beholden to the advanced flows of capital across territories—and, crucial to this argument, its relationships to territorial industrial film policies—is what requires a more dynamic and complex conceptual architecture within the analysis of multinational film production. As theorists of financialisation have articulated, capital's expansive dynamics means that circulatory mechanisms shape even spheres of production that have been primarily analysed as discrete spheres of activity in themselves. The increased role of capital circulation in the production of value is a prerequisite for understanding the financialisation of media industries and production, especially in the understanding of how commodity (content) production, labour, and its markets are reshaped by FDI-driven industrial policies across territories. Recent media industries research has demonstrated that the interpenetration of financial speculation with global media—especially in the form of blockbuster productions and the "streamers"—influences more than just content, but the entire geographical and social structure of media production systems, from the microfinances of competing platform and small content-producing entrepreneurs (see Caldwell, 2023; Poell et al., 2021) to the larger-scale financialisation of blockbuster cinema via investment firms and hedge funds (see Acland, 2020; Dewaard, 2020; Kidman, 2019). While the practical and everyday

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realities of life as a media worker in Ireland may seem detached from these types of rationalities, film and media policy in Ireland is increasingly defined by the logic that tax breaks for multinational production (and post-production) are essential for the sustainability of the industry at scale. As Vittorio Bufacchi argues in the wider FDI context, this dependence irrevocably ties Ireland into precarious boom and bust cycles dependent upon these financial flows and the wreckage they leave behind in times of crisis (2023).

Even in contexts where companies manage to navigate and leverage these flows towards growing local business, including in Ireland, the reality of the industry's dependence upon multinational capital—as contexts like Florida indicate, which lost its tax incentive due to a right-wing turn in 2014 (Morton, 2019)—means that such producers would likely struggle for viability without these schemes. Vicki Mayer, for example, has memorably demonstrated in the case of New Orleans that these tax breaks tether places and their labour forces to the fickle and opportunistic flows of media corporations and their calculative and detached decisions for choosing sites of production (2017). While tax incentives mean that jobs are created by incoming productions, these are not permanent—if the tax break goes, so do the productions and jobs 'brought' by them. These apparently common-sensical arrangements of media capital, as Mayer reminds us in a virtuoso impersonation of a regional tax break (2017, p. ix-xi), are not somehow 'natural', however much their methods of circulation may be naturalised. Owners of capital always have intention, which is largely to exploit infrastructural, governmental, and labour systems to redirect value further and deeper into their own pools of accumulation. In this environment, in spite of policy promises to the contrary, the global supply chain of media production cannot take care of workers by its very nature as a system of value-squeezing optimisation, and enables public funds ring-fenced for 'culture' to support private investment with uncertain and imbalanced employment opportunities. Curtin emphasises that,

> Confronted by the spatially expansive and intrusive operations of global media conglomerates, government officials have, over the past couple of decades, confused cultural concerns with economic and political objectives. (2016, p. 683)

This confusion is a historically situated decision based on a logic of financial austerity which positions people as capital—contributors to a machine of transnational extraction—within an intensified environment of entrepreneurialism and individual realisation, as so-called 'spillover' effects and industries such as screen tourism are seen as the ultimate enduring benefit for people and regions who support multinational film productions (see Brodie, 2020). As long as the common-sense logic—that capital investment is good, FDI is good, and this then organises the structure of production—then media and other 'creative' workers will be subject to the remainders left behind by these rationalities.

Tellingly, the intensified focus on FDI in film has thrived especially since the 2007 - 2008 financial crisis, when the policy language of Screen Ireland (formerly Irish Film Board) has shifted drastically in promoting inward investment schemes in response to external pressures to draw in investment to replace evacuated funds (see also O'Brien et al., 2021, p. 22-24). In times of financial crisis and austerity, public programs get cut, and cultural programs are among the first to go, representing culture's constant double-bind between economy and viability. Between 2008 and 2016, funding

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for the Irish Film Board was cut by 44%. And this is true even as films like *Brooklyn* (2015), *Room* (2015), *Frank* (2014), and others were going to international festivals, winning awards and Oscars. By 2009, Ministers and industry boosters were already out pounding the pavement and extoling the virtues of the recently re-vamped Section 481 tax scheme, which today provides 32% (and for a time graduated several percentage points for rural areas, in a scheme which has since tapered off) tax relief to eligible expenditure in Ireland, and the need to increase caps on financial relief for inward investment in order to catalyse further industry growth.

While such recourses to 'creativity' as drivers of economic activity are familiar now, the timing of such commitments in 2009 amidst the financial crisis is crucial, as during periods of austerity, the viability of historically "public" goods like culture come to depend more and more on private-sector investment through for-profit activities like urban "regeneration" (see Hesmondhalgh, 2008). Over the next several years, these caps and financial structures underwent periodic adjustment and loosening, just as the language and outward policy of Screen Ireland (then Irish Film Board) would more directly call for inward investment for industry sustainability (complete with the activation of an outward soft power infrastructure to bring this investment in) (see Murphy and O'Brien, 2015). For example, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) and *The Last Jedi* (2017), while not ostensibly set in "Ireland," availed of these lucrative tax credits by promising durable post-production "spinoff effects" via tourism and other adjacently "creative" sectors, however much these are largely chimeric and immeasurable quantities (Barton, 2018; Brodie 2020). But while perhaps newly vulnerable to critiques of financialisation,

> Section 481 has always functioned as an incentive for mobile international film capital to locate production in Ireland. While the new regulations continue the requirement for the participation and accreditation of an "Irish based" producer, there is no stipulation that he or she be attached to an Irish production company (Murphy and O'Brien, 2015, p. 225).

—introducing potential short-changing for even successful 'Irish entrepreneurs,' identified as an important spinoff beneficiary of FDI schemes from the 1990s (O'Hearn, 2000).

The overarching inward investment agency for the country, IDA Ireland, represents the country's FDI-based economic development strategies as traced above. Film is among the latest on the list of things that needs to be sustained by FDI in order to remain viable, and today Screen Ireland works close with the IDA to ensure the continued flow of investment into Irish film productions. Their language, drawn from the website in early 2023, even parrots that of these inward investment agencies:

> Ireland is a film friendly country. Our film, television and animation industry has experienced consistent Government support over the last two decades and has become a global success story...The Inward Production team at Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland is here to offer you as much on the ground logistical support and advise on filming in Ireland as you need, to ensure your experience in Ireland is as productive as possible. (Screen Ireland, n.d.)

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In this way, the agency increasingly focused on assisting in the management of media production supply chains (via 'logistical support') in alignment with the 'film-friendly inward investment schemes' that mimic those of other sectors, with the language of 'film-friendly' echoing the well-worn "business-friendly" promises of the IDA towards FDI companies. Film, within these FDI-driven policy logics, becomes a product partially assembled in Ireland, a modern-day manufacturing facility processing exports to be sold on the global market.

Inward Investment and Supply Chain Production

Overlaps between financialisation and supply chains occur across the diverse geographies of media: tax incentives attract foreign media capital, which extracts value and funnels profits through financial instruments back to productive film centres like the US, UK, and India. Until 2015, financial instruments, such as special purpose vehicles (SPVs), short-term companies put in place to accommodate FDI and avail of tax benefits, acted as conduits through which media finance circulated the space of Ireland. The 2011 *Creative Capital* report was particularly influential in the transformation of screen media policy in the 2010s, demonstrating the increasing focus on employing financial instruments through film production to serve creative enterprise goals. The policy recommendations in the report include greater engagement with the banking sector by attracting 'angel investors' and 'venture capital', asserting that 'strong relationships with the banking sector are important and should be a key function of enterprise development' (Department for Arts, Culture, and the Gaeltacht, 2011, p.7). The Section 481 tax scheme is designed to put these financial conditions in place. Previously, a variety of actors could invest in a media property as part of speculative investment portfolios. However, in 2015, the scheme transitioned from, as Denis Murphy and Maria O'Brien describe, 'investor-led' to 'exchequer-led' (2015), meaning global investor risk was replaced by Irish taxpayer money. It ostensibly ensures that companies do not take liberties with public benefits, and that an Irish workforce is hired, for example, by mandating that all FDI must partner with an Irish production company or establish a long-term subsidiary in Ireland. However, large-scale productions can buy companies to still avail of the benefit depending on how they are able to justify their spend, employing whatever workforce they need to finish the project. Additionally, the 'cultural test'—designed to somehow assess the cultural belonging of a film project to a host nation for tax relief purposes—is at this point quite permissive. Regardless, the accumulation of capital still follows the same route, ultimately offering less investor risk for greater benefit of the global production company.

Part of this came as film and media industries were incentivised and promoted as a post-financial crisis success story, in partnership with other agencies such as the IDA, the state's primary organ to attract FDI. Screen Ireland, in this environment, becomes another de facto "inward investment" agency. As James Hickey, then head of the Irish Film Board, argued in 2015 after the success of co-productions like *Brooklyn* and *Room* at the Academy Awards,

> The opportunity to work with the IDA opens up additional networks to those we already have and brings further strength to our proposition about the benefits of Ireland and Irish creative talent. (qtd. Screen Ireland, 2015).

While, as this article has emphasised, film in Ireland has historically been geared towards these external productions, the convergence of more explicit industrial growth logics with shifting

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landscapes of financialisation and logistical management has major implications for the sector's future. In the same article, Martin Shanahan, CEO of the IDA, furthers this economistic vision of Screen Ireland's work with the IDA, emphasising the Irish film sector's 'half a billion' in yearly turnover and employment as well as the country's overall tax regime, its multinational tech environment, connections to the North American market, and 'track record in creativity' (qtd. Screen Ireland 2015). As the IDA and Screen Ireland work more frequently together in the attraction of FDI via film, whether in the form of Troy Studios—a 350,000 sq. ft film studio project established in Limerick in 2017—or explicit partnerships between the agencies, we are likely to see more rather than less emphasis on the sector's need to support big fish. The Section 481 scheme paid out €604M between 2015 - 2021, and the Department of Finance acknowledges that these expenses are crucial to maintain the 'certainty' of the audiovisual industry and its workers (Deegan, 2023).

As the above sections demonstrate, this strategy is concretely interrelated with Ireland's wider economic strategies, and these connections between other FDI companies and industries have been a key promotion point for attracting further multinational film investment. As producer Larry Bass argued when advocating for the film industry's central inclusion in the Creative Ireland policy scheme, a cross-sectoral Government organisation centred on promoting creativity as a cultural good,

> We need to start recognising that investment in television, investment in R&D, needs to be treated the same way as investment in pharma, and should have the same tax treatmentC (qtd. in Slattery, 2017)

—meaning, in Irish tax structure, being able to evade full tax liability. Similar to the 2011 *Creative Capital*'s positioning of finance as crucial to the coming media economy and Shanahan's above-quoted comments about Ireland's wider creative and tech sectors, Screen Ireland cites the 'crossover' benefits of other industries, particularly big tech and digital companies, as a reason to invest in the Irish film industry (along with tax breaks, skilled workforce, good locations, and general infrastructure) (Screen Ireland, 2020). This convergence is more explicitly referenced in *Creative Capital*, which argues that Ireland's multinational tech industry 'is a resource Irish content producers have not yet used to full advantage' (Department for Arts, Culture, and the Gaeltacht, 2011, p. 7). Shanahan also emphasises this a few years later, positing that

> digitisation has disrupted and is driving the industry particularly in the graphics, post production, visual effects, content capture and content distribution areas. Ireland is at the crest of these technology changes and its education system is producing world leading graduates in relevant computer and IT disciplines (qtd. in Screen Ireland, 2015).

This language is reflected explicitly in Screen Ireland website copy.

As these examples attest, what ostensibly is still situated as a cultural policy agency appears, at this point in its own promotional copy, designed to facilitate nationally-subsidised production for private companies and capital interests through an expanded sense of 'content' and the global assembly line of big budget productions—from pre- to post-production to distribution to everything peripheral and in-between. This practical and rhetorical shift is evident in the Screen Ireland rebrand in 2018. In expanding the scope of their operations to projects outside typical banners of

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feature, documentary, and short films to incorporate a more wide-ranging idea of the 'screen industries' and the manufacturing of 'great content' in the 'audiovisual sector' (PriceWaterhouse Cooper, 2016), Screen Ireland plug cultural policy into more diverse sets of creative industry sectors and corporate development strategies.

Cultural Supply Chains

The 'public' purview of cultural enterprise allows financial logics to operate largely under the radar and in the service of public interests and benefits to the population (for an example of economic impact justification, see PriceWaterhouse Coopers, 2020, p. 19-26). None of this argument is designed to propagate unhelpful discussions of what constitutes worthwhile 'culture', to re-awaken film as industry or artistry debates (see Holt and Perren, 2009), nor is it to territorialise what is important about film and culture for 'public' or 'sovereign' formations. I will leave that to the cultural critics. But it is rather to emphasise that the financial mechanisms described above fundamentally transform the logics of what this means, and ultimately affect worker stability in these industry sectors, encouraging flexibility, competition, and a hustle culture that affects practitioners' lifestyles. As production studies scholars such as John Thornton Caldwell have also shown (2023), the subjective spread of financialisation and the forms of work that are necessary to sustain a living in an environment of global precarity means that even small-scale content producers all must fashion themselves as micro-entrepreneurs. In a focused analysis of media graduates in Ireland, Anne O'Brien, Sarah Arnold, and Páraic Kerrigan find that media policy interacts and overlaps with education and industrial practice in ways that directly affect worker livelihoods in an environment of competitive and largely unavailable support (2021). In Ireland as elsewhere, workers are accustomed to 'hustling' from opportunity to opportunity within a competitive environment of small-scale funds and provisions—conditioned, from the media education system to the industry, for short-term work and just-in-time media supply chains (see Dickinson, 2024; O'Brien et al., 2021).

More directly, those who work primarily in directly Section 481 supported areas report working well in excess of average Irish working hours with a high rate of freelancing, familiar across the media sector more broadly (Olsberg SPI, 2023). O'Brien et al find that many recent media graduates are ambivalent about the extolled benefits of the Section 481 as a primary policy objective, especially around its promises of skills training required to obtain more regular and permanent work (2021, p. 24). Even so-called 'prominent' workers in the Irish film industry supplement their income with gigs in adjacent media sectors such as advertising (see O'Hagan et al., 2022), and high-profile strike actions by SAG and WGA in Hollywood demonstrate how these shifting and speculative financial dynamics affect workers both above- and below-the-line.

This is not to say that inward investment schemes do not bring short-term prosperity and even longer-term benefits in the form of jobs, skills training, resume building, networking, local spinoffs, or any of the other reasons that these things are argued to, and often do, materially benefit specific places, not to mention the financial takes of industry on a macro-scale. These strategies have no doubt been successful from a macroeconomic standpoint, and in the successful promotion of Ireland as an increasingly viable place to support these types of productions. In 2019, Irish film, TV, and animation had over €760M in combined budgets and spent over €357M into local economies; a 162% increase from 2018 and 256% from 2007 at the start of the crisis (Screen

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Ireland, n.d.). In 2021, 3,265 people were employed full-time on Section 481 productions (Deegan 2023), with an estimated FDI total of €332M (Olsberg SPI. 2023, p. 65), and the global success of these projects was reflected by a record number of Irish nominations at the 2023 Academy Awards. Skills-training on the job, which must be signed off on by Screen Ireland at the close of a production, is also undoubtedly a benefit of these schemes, even if the merit of contracting this to private productions is disputed (O'Brien et al., 2021, p. 24).

But, as this article argues, we need to step back from the massive numbers supporting these initiatives and look at the ground level. Does this rising tide truly lift all boats at once, and do these benefits truly lead to prosperity and stability for workers? At post-production studios, for example, '481 spend', as it is referred to, does not look like permanent employment but rather individual fixed-term contracts for the duration of projects, with facilities similarly scalable to the different size and quantities of work available based on current flow of media capital into the space (see also Acland, 2018). Workers, in these policies, become interchangeable bundles of skills and "talent" rather than citizens provided consistent employment and opportunity, however much they may be supported and fulfilled in the short-term on individual projects (see Olsberg SPI, 2023). Even if you agree that 'a rising tide lifts all boats', a receding tide still leaves them run aground, and the Irish state has minimal control over when this tide comes and goes.

According to Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013), finance and logistics go arm in arm in how these economic rationalities organise sites of production—efficiencies are calculated, and valuable, based on the ability of a place to plug into these global systems, marshalling labour, infrastructures, and resources into the fold for abstract value production, on the one hand, but by material coordination on the other. But as Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, p. 13) continue, and emphasising the spread of these logics beyond obvious sites of economic activity and production,

> The labour [finance, extraction and logistics] demand is not limited to transport workers, financial traders or miners,' extending to domains and labour formations treated as 'intellectual' or 'creative' in character.

The ability of these domains to create formatted rationalities by which particular models of production can be followed via the construction of supporting infrastructure means that sites become transferable, their relations to knowledge, skills, and facilities interoperable, eroding the importance of ostensibly "public" and democratic state relations to this production in the process. The important part is that models can be reproduced, with the right degree of spatial diversity pitted against the "smooth" movement of capital and information (see Cowen, 2014).

The practical implications of this necessary coordination of activities across these various sites, via the managerial rationalities of finance and logistics, typically fall on the stability and livelihood of workers, even those who are not ostensibly employed full-time in the "screen industries" as defined by industry reports (which is an intentionally fuzzy category, and should undoubtedly include those who also work and/or freelance in adjacent sectors such as marketing, social media content, advertising, and industrial film to give a full picture of the ecosystem) (Olsberg SPI, 2023). It is not the individual studio's fault, necessarily, in the case above, that they need to consistently let staff go and re-hire them based on when a project comes available. Big projects from different territories and industrial/funding contexts are shopping—bids are put in, needs are met or not met, better or worse than other places. Even individual firms are subject to the success or failure of public policy, in the case of Ireland, '481 spend', but this is as a result of state policy that encourages this type of

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flexible coordination of inward investment for different links along the film and media supply chain. Space, financial incentives, labour pools, and technical infrastructure form an apparently thriving film industry machinery, requiring only periodic influxes of transnational capital to fire into action — but if that capital evacuates, the foundational stability of this media industrial formation becomes severely compromised.

Conclusion: Finance and Media Supply Chains

To conclude, the embrace of the profit-making potential of Irish cultural enterprise is a long- and short-term phenomenon, responsive to different economic development mandates, coinciding with slashes in funding due to austerity and the lasting effects of the 2007-2008 financial crisis, in many ways imposed by different wings of the same supranational structures of the EU which govern how Ireland co-produces and manages its film production and wider cultural industry environment. This is an inescapable double-bind: an exceptional shift towards profit-motivated policy language due to external economic pressures which then leads to a decline in cultural sovereignty over media output but an immeasurable rise in employment and ‘externalities’ through infrastructure developed at this time, which cannot then accommodate localised production without continued foreign investment. In effect, such mechanisms are the only way for the industry to stay afloat under prevailing logics of cultural governance—whether driven by austerity in particular or longer versions of economic development policy through culture. Reflected in the language of these public bodies are what Mezzadra and Neilson refer to as the interlocking logics of ‘extraction, logistics, and finance’, which, they argue, thrive in an environment of austerity and the slashing of public services (2013, p. 8); meaning that whatever the case, the intensification of broadly corrosive economic policies is occurring across all sectors. The screen industries are but one casualty of this private sector creep during Ireland’s naturalised austerity which I argue has continued since 2007-2008, albeit in different and transforming ways. While funding has increased, the basic arrangements forged during austerity remain durable. To critique such FDI-led policies is to jeopardise the industrial viability of the sector.

This final point is to emphasise that the supply chain organisation of new media economies, whether in the re-organisation of legacy media or the more recent networks of digital content and distribution, compel a fundamental privatisation of the benefits of media by contracting the “public good” and support systems to multinational media companies, who then are also able to reap significant and tax-averse profits. As Murphy and O’Brien argue (2015, p. 225), while investor-led film production has been the norm in Ireland and elsewhere for much of recent history, strategies like the Section 481

> might be more appropriately classified as exchequer-led, as State largesse continues to underpin the scheme, by some measure the most significant market support mechanism subsidising film, TV drama, documentary and animation production in Ireland.

This embeddedness of the supply chain cinema model creates an environment where workers are exposed most extremely to the risks of a global media marketplace, while state support can do little but continue to direct profit-driven investment through the territory to support industrial jobs. Film labour’s long hours, freelance contracts, ‘flexibility’, and hustle culture, widely recognised even in industry-produced reports (Olsberg SPI, 2023), is not a result of something intrinsic to the

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industry, but something that distinctly develops out of a longer history of globalisation, outsourcing, offshoring, and the casualisation derived as these various intensive and extensive processes put workers in increasingly difficult binds to compete for work and funding (see O'Brien et al., 2021). This is a function and not a bug—and film policy has in large part adopted these functionalities by acting as a facilitator for the 'operations of capital' as they are enacted through global film productions.

I argue that, in understandings of media industries specifically and their relations to circulation, we need to look not only at the financialisation but the logistical coordination of space through these tax mechanisms in order to better understand the labour implications of what Dickinson (2024) calls 'supply chain cinema'. Ireland, as one of many nodes (and having its own geographical imbalances and formations within), has a role to play in the operation of this global system, as well as in its potential disruption. One primary way to disrupt it is to materially support media workers with direct public investment in arts and culture, rather than a shrugging acceptance of media austerity logics which see large-scale FDI as the most practical way forward, even at the expense of workers' and artists' stability, support, and livelihoods. As Dickinson (2024, p. 45) argues forcefully, British film policy similarly sacrifices its own workers and the viability of film art as a public good at the altar of global media capital:

> Rather than investing in other aspects of state or citizenry support, rather, even, than concentrating on more squarely national cultural expression that might stand up well to Hollywood fare, these measures, I contend, amount to purposeful engineering of a supply chain service industry. Orchestrated by the logistical state, they undercut the costs of production elsewhere, all under-written by the British tax payer. These moves fuel a competitive rivalry for (rather than autonomy from) Hollywood's attention as new countries and regions each year join the incentives game, increasingly affirming the tax break as a necessary price for advertising one's capabilities to supply chain cinema.

I broadly align with Dickinson's polemic, arguing that serious questions about the viability of these strategies need to be raised within leftist approaches to cultural policy. In Ireland, the industry is not quite as powerful, and does not command as much revenue or infrastructure as in Britain, but it remains true that public tax support is facilitating the funnelling of capital into projects produced or worked on in Ireland in the service of global media companies' financial and logistical management. As multinational tech converges with traditional media production and innovates new and more insidious forms of value extraction and labour exploitation, in Hollywood and across the global media sector more broadly, it is worth inquiring into the 'development' strategy of FDI in the media industries and more broadly, especially as Ireland potentially becomes complicit in the further offshoring of global productions in order to utilise the country's favourable intellectual property driven tax conditions (especially pertinent with regards to the integration of artificial intelligence tools into the media production sector and the labour contestations happening around it). At the very least, we need to understand the intricacies of these policy logics and how the industry influences and exploits them in order how to make global media productions pay their fair share, create more stable working conditions, and contribute to the true ongoing sustainability of

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the Irish film industry if these flows of media finance suddenly shift away from the island to even more tax-friendly shores.

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