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Finland: Production incentive for audiovisual sector will become a Tekes service in 2017

Merja Salonen · Tuesday, October 4th, 2016

We are delighted to have the opportunity to help build Finland's audiovisual sector and an incentive model that will expedite the development of the related service companies. That is the outcome of years of research and lobbying by film commissions and organisations, which we now aim to leverage in creating a customer-oriented and competitive service. A budget of EUR 10 million for 2017 has been proposed as a production incentive. The incentive will represent a 25% refund for expenses incurred in Finland, to be paid retroactively against receipts.

The Finnish TV, film and animation sectors are internationalising rapidly. In September, Finnish Film Affair gathered a host of international buyers, production companies and financiers in Helsinki. In addition, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which organises the Golden Globe Awards, participated in several of the events, on the basis of a delegation led by a colleague and member, the journalist Kirpi Uimonen. The panel discussion on the seminar day was moderated by Adam Leipzig, the Los Angeles-based CEO of Media Entertainment Partners. Leipzig has worked on more than 30 films as a producer, distributor and a leading expert in the sector. The resulting films have earned over USD 2 billion and have been awarded several prizes and nominations.

Leipzig is delighted by Finland's production incentive, commenting that it will open up the Finnish film industry to the world: "Finland's competitive advantage is affected by three factors: Firstly, production companies want to know how long Finland will be committed to issuing the incentive. In practice, shooting locations for 2017 productions have already been agreed and you are now marketing the years 2018–2019. Another issue is the payment period for the incentive, which should not exceed six months. Thirdly, production companies are attracted by production-phase funding arrangements."

Of course, the quality and availability of services are important. In terms of services, Leipzig mentions the role of experienced and skilled teams, from lighting to camera operators and production managers. Accommodation for even the most refined tastes would need to be available near the shooting locations. Shooting would also be made easier by nearby airports and a good road network. However, one issue matters above all others: "Since food is the easiest way to keep a crew happy, their wishes need to be responded to and fulfilled even if this means providing a specialized chef," Adam Leipzig adds with a smile.

Hopefully, these comments by the American film industry expert will encourage policy-makers to ensure the continuity of the incentive, since at least three years are needed in order to have an impact. In turn, we at Tekes must create an operating model which realises the incentive for production companies in weeks rather than months. It remains to be seen whether the Finnish banking sector will be interested in production-phase financing.

The incentive model is being developed on the basis of Team Finland collaboration, in which key roles are played by Tekes, Finpro and Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Content expertise is represented by regional film commissions, Audio Visual Finland, Finnanimation, the Association of independent producers in Finland (SATU ry), the Finnish Film Foundation and various companies.

The first tasks of Tekes will involve organising the application process, selection criteria, marketing and follow-up. We will issue information on these as soon as possible. First, we will need a new government decree on funding and a decision by parliament. We believe that the incentive will foster growth and internationalisation in the AV and service sectors throughout Finland.

P.S.: The Elements of Success research project conducted by the Department of Film, Television and Scenography of Aalto University and funded by Tekes, will begin exploring the success factors behind long films in January 2017. More on this later!

Top image: Producer Adam Leipzig in the forests of Kuusamo, Finland. Photo by Lotta Salonen.

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