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Timber, horses and dollars in free currency: Film policy cycles and the Italian-Yugoslav 1957 co-production agreements

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Timber, horses and dollars in free currency: Film policy cycles and the Italian-Yugoslav 1957 co-production agreements.

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Abstract

In this article, we analyze the Italian and Yugoslavian film co-productions in the context of the Eastern/Western politics of the Cold War era. In December 1957, the two countries signed their first co-production agreements, designed to foster reciprocal industrial and artistic cooperation. Although only two official co-productions were made, until the late 1960s, the two film industries cooperated on the making of about 40 films, during which time Yugoslavian companies were denied artistic control and downgraded to a labour and locations supplier.

By examining archival sources, we will demonstrate that Italian state bureaucracy had a pivotal role in making film co-production an organizational field where subjects and institutions interact, regulate power relations and communicate. This will allow us to highlight the role of co-production as a form of management of international relations, focusing on issues such as the lack of balance between partners, and the financial rationale behind these arrangements.

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Introduction: The industrial and bureaucratic process of Italian-Yugoslav co-production

Because of its historical collocation and cultural function, historical research on Italian-Yugoslav film co-production can shed light on the function of the Italian film industry, its internal structure (Corsi 2001; Nicoli 2016) and its patterns of international circulation (Wagstaff 1995; Scaglioni 2020), but also on the way the co-production institution has been thought of and discussed to date by scholars and practitioners.

In the post-war period, Italian cinema, just like other industrial sectors offering goods and services that were dominated by the small and medium-sized enterprises model, expanded in both domestic and foreign markets. Growth was also stimulated by different competitive factors such as low labour costs, small-sized production companies and little reliance on an economy of scale (Colli and Rinaldi 2015:252) This expansion took place within a framework of relations and a management of conflicting interests that can be defined as *neo-corporatist* (Lehmbruch 2003:104), that is, a system whose operating principle is not characterised by the

opposition between state and private enterprise, but by the involvement of those intermediate bodies that represent the interests at stake in decision-making and regulatory processes. In the case of Italian cinema trade unions, producers, trade associations and supervising and controlling bodies of the state acted as subjects that essentially contributed to the industry and negotiated, revised and implemented co-production agreements. Within this organizational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), a special role was played by the Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo (General Directorate of Show Business) (henceforth DGS), an office that directly depended on the Undersecretary of State to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (succeeded by the Ministry of Tourism and Show Business) until the end of the 1950s. The Italian state was involved in virtually every aspect of the post-war film industry – from financing to studio management, production and film distribution – either through public-owned or controlled companies, which, as distinct from Hollywood studios, were never part of a vertically integrated and coordinated circuit. The combined provisions of the laws and rules enforced by the state in the post-war years made the DGS a bureaucratic hub to which requests for such diverse matters as funding, censorship visas, labour controversies and currency transactions were addressed. More specifically, requests submitted by producers for the recognition of the nationality of films, which in turn allowed access to soft loans provided by the state-controlled Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, were organised in files (one for each project submitted to the DGS) that are now conserved at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (State Central Archive) (henceforth ACS). This archive contains evidence of the day-to-day mediation and negotiation between the industrial stakeholders carried out by the DGS and it is a major primary source in our research.

In the Italian case, scholarship on co-productions, although insightful and well-documented, must be used with extreme caution to avoid generalisations. Research on this field often spotlights the production stage but marginalises co-production agreements as an ancillary

form of cooperation completing the value chain (Parc 2020); it does not take an organizational or comparative approach and instead focuses on one-off projects, where each project is a case in and of itself (Morawetz et al. 2007). Above all, existing scholarship focuses on present-day cases by adopting a synchronic view that is strongly characterised by the system of rules and types of existing and contemporary collaboration (Baltruschat 2013). It is also customary to consider the question of cultural exception as the ideological and political key to co-productions and to see purely industrial collaborations as ‘neoliberal’ attempts to overcome the purported hindrances of artistic and cultural collaboration (Mitric 2018).

The case of Italian-Yugoslav film co-production deserves attention for at least three reasons. First, the value chain model fits poorly the Italian film industry because of the limited size of short-lived, undercapitalized private companies. These do not provide the staple of the system, which is instead provided by distributors/exhibitors, state agencies and intermediate structures – such as trade associations – whose actions outreach the dimension of the single film as a case study (Di Chiara and Noto 2021). Second, the practice of co-production was established in the post-war years, well before the concept of ‘cultural exception’ (Buchsbaum 2006). The Italian-Yugoslav example suggests that cultural function is one of the possible principles underlying film co-productions, and that in the past, just as in the present, other concerns were also on the table that pushed stakeholders to negotiate about conflicting matters – which have remained a point of contention until quite recently – such as the legitimacy of minority shares, the participation of small national industries and the purely financial contribution in co-production arrangements. Third, our access to a substantial archival documentation allows us to investigate this set of problems and solutions diachronically, complementing a synchronic approach with attention to historical patterns and behaviours.

Methodologically speaking, this entails looking away from films as outcomes and instead scrutinising production files, formal agreements, private contracts and memos in order

to trace interruptions in the production flow (Stubbs 2021), deceiving practices (Ehrenreich 2021) and the negotiations that took place between various public and private actors (e.g. film workers, producers, state bodies controlling and directing production) led by different interests that all acted on the same organizational field. This approach helps us reconstruct the overall industrial and institutional framework of Italian-Yugoslav co-productions through the triangulation of archival sources in Italy and secondary sources relating to the Yugoslav film industry. Archival evidence sheds light on exchanges between the respective bureaucrats and producers during the signing of agreements and the actual making of films.

This paper will primarily focus on the inner working of Italian state bureaucracy. Linguistic reasons aside, Italian and Yugoslav systems were very different from one another, both in their structure and organizational continuity (or lack thereof). Throughout the second half of the 20th Century, the Italian film industry remained a centralized system where, despite major reform in 1965, the DGS worked as the main regulating force and financial enabler. The Yugoslav industry, on the other hand, had already experienced a major structural overhaul in its first post-war decade, marked by a progressive process of decentralization following the self-management reform in 1950. This process moved the control of enterprises into the hands of self-organized workers, allowed some forms of private initiative in negotiating deals between firms and separated management responsibilities from the state, thus marking a radical shift in the whole economy of the Federation (Goulding 1985: 35-36). The Yugoslav film sector went through several systemic reforms between 1951 and 1969 (Volk 1986: 128-35), all of which displaced power and agency from the federal centre towards trade associations and Republican Ministries (Parenta 2015). Such processes rendered the Yugoslav film industry a one-of-a-kind system, far from both the socialist film industries of Central and Eastern Europe and the capitalist, yet state-supported, film industries of Western Europe. For instance, the DGS's counterpart in the negotiations surrounding the implementation of the co-production

agreements was the Yugoslav Film Producers Association (Udruženje filmskih proizvođača Jugoslavije), that is, a trade association, rather than a governmental agency. Documents on these processes and agencies are available in the state archives of the former Yugoslavia, but to our knowledge, there is no accessible historical reconstruction of the bureaucratic and productive system that would allow us, setting aside language barriers, to compare the two systems and study them in parallel, not only in their interchanges.

Thus, focusing on a more stable and relatively well-known institution, such as the Italian DGS, and on its rich archive (as well as on the archives of Italian film companies often dealing with Yugoslavian partners, such as Vides), has enabled us to delve into the relationship and the power imbalances between these two different contexts, and also to test the usefulness of analytic tools coming from political science in order to make sense of the process of implementation of co-production agreements.

Italy and Yugoslavia: A relationship within and beyond cinema

The Italian-Yugoslav relationship is worthy of particular attention for a series of interconnected reasons. It is exceptional that the two countries signed a co-production agreement as early as 1957 (DPR 5 March 1958 N. 463), just three years after the *de facto* resolution of disputes around the Free Territory of Trieste issued by the London Memorandum of 1954. Yugoslavia was one of the first countries where co-productions occurred. After the pioneering Franco-Italian agreement of 1949, similar deals were made with Federal Germany, in 1952, and Spain, in 1953. A legal and state-controlled framework allowed for the transnational collaboration of producers in a challenging climate of protectionist national cinema measures such as screen quotas and public funding. This formal step was coherent with Italian politics towards Yugoslavia in a phase ‘characterized by the decision completely to separate economic relations from diplomatic and political problems’ (Ruzicic-Kessler 2014: 645). Although this first co-

production agreement between the two nations was significantly underutilized, leading to the production of only two films before 1968, *Il vendicatore (Dubrowsky)* (Dieterle, 1958) and *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco (The White Warrior)* (Freda, 1959), this seeming ineffectiveness is itself of interest. In fact, the absence of formal co-productions did not prevent the two countries from collaborating on several other films under the much more nebulous label – from the perspective of official treaties – of co-partnership (*compartecipazione*). Contextual factors regarding the economic exchanges and international roles of the two countries further illuminate their filmmaking collaboration.

The geographical proximity of Italy and Yugoslavia is a first element to consider when understanding the cultural and industrial exchanges between them. Milak's comprehensive account of the establishment of Italian-Yugoslav commercial relationships provides factual and methodological insights into this complex relationship (1988-1989). Italy was a fundamental commercial partner of the recently formed Yugoslavia and, until the crisis in 1948, its secondary supplier after the USSR. Trade with Italy began out of material necessity and in the absence of formal regulations (Milak 1988-1989: 70-1), which were circumvented when deemed appropriate by the controlling bodies. The first extensive treaty between the two countries was signed in 1948, though not without internal disputes on the Italian side and formulated 'quota lists' of product groups authorised for bilateral trade. As Milak notes, these lists stipulated that Yugoslavia should export mainly raw materials (coal, wood, agricultural produce) to Italy, while importing mechanical, chemical, electrical and textile products from the country (Milak 1988-1989: 77). Beginning with the immediate post-war period, the two countries were complementary producers, and this dynamic set the tone for agreements in the following decades. As Capriati states:

This pattern is consistent with what normally occurs in trade between two countries with different degrees of development such as Italy and Yugoslavia: the more advanced one exports higher value-added goods (skill intensive, scale intensive or technology intensive), the other exchanges products that presumably rely on more available and/or lower cost factors (as in the case of resource intensive and labour intensive goods). (Capriati 2004:162)

The pattern of *technology intensive vs resource/labour intensive* production was repeated in the case of filmmaking. In addition, regulatory frameworks generated institutional conflicts that, retrospectively, allow us to outline the functioning of the institutions themselves. Proximity also made possible cultural exchanges charged with enormous symbolic value, such as those related to leisure and lifestyle. As Rolandi writes, in the post-war years and especially from the mid-1950s onwards, when both countries experienced remarkable economic growth, Italy became a point of cultural reference and material access to modern consumerism for the Yugoslav public (2015: 67-97). Italian vehicles and fashion items were a regular presence in Yugoslav films and visual culture, but also in the material lives of citizens due to the relative loosening of border controls that allowed some form of shopping tourism. Private mobility interlinked cinematic representation and the Yugoslav local economy. The filmmaking agreements were predated by the car manufacturer FIAT's licensing of the Zastava Factory in Yugoslavia, which industrialised and modernised the country (Miljković 2017).

A second element of interest concerns the geopolitical role of the two countries in the international arena. Both Italy and Yugoslavia were relative exceptions in their spheres of influence because of the nature of state-led capitalism in Italy (that affected the film industry in specific ways) and the mixed economy in Yugoslavia (where the self-management system also had an impact on film production). Geopolitical status and proximity made Italian-

Yugoslav exchanges a test for other East/West relationships, not least by making Yugoslavia a convenient gateway for Western culture in socialist Europe. As Ruzicic-Kessler asserts:

These very important steps of rapprochement and détente show that the Italian–Yugoslav case is indeed a precursor to what Europe experienced a few years later with West German–east European relations. Moreover, considering later achievements of Federal Germany towards eastern Europe, or even Austria’s relations to Hungary, it can be stated that Italy and Yugoslavia were the first neighbours ‘from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic’ to succeed in implementing the steps needed to achieve good neighbourly relations. (2014: 647)

We can thus consider the Fiat/Zastava agreement of 1954 as forerunning the arrangement signed between Fiat and the Soviet government in 1966 for the construction of the Volga Automotive Factory (Fava 2018). The 1957 Italian-Yugoslav co-production agreement similarly culminated in the Italian-Soviet co-production deal that was finalised in 1967. The latter was as difficult in its application as the former (Pisu 2019: 53).

The policy cycle and implementation process

Like other complex international arrangements, co-productions between Italy and Yugoslavia involved multiple subjects from different sectors of the political and industrial field, who worked both synchronically (decision-making, formulating agreements, managing individual ventures) and diachronically (monitoring ongoing industry relationships and projected renewals of bilateral agreements). In order to make sense of these evolving networks, we will adapt two concepts from the policy analysis field.

The first concept is the policy cycle framework premised on Lasswell's research first published in the 1950s (1971) (Dunn 2018: 42-46). Here, the decision-making process is conceived of as a sequence of discrete stages, which go from a first stage, where problem recognition and agenda setting take place, to a second stage of policy formulation, to an implementation stage, and finally to a stage where there is an evaluation of policy outcomes before its termination, reformulation or confirmation. This sequence is envisioned as a cycle, as policy evaluation often leads to the emergence of further problems and to an elaboration on possible solutions, in potentially everlasting repetition. Originally devised as a normative tool for policymakers, this framework has been criticized for its oversimplification of the policymaking process (Werner and Wegrich 2007: 55-58). However, if taken solely as a general framework, the policy cycle retains an important heuristic value, and it has been the basis for in-depth analyses of specific steps of the policymaking process. For instance, it has recently been reworked by Paquette and Redaelli (2015) as a tool for cultural policy analysis and by Mitric (2018) in the revision of the Council of Europe Convention on Cinematographic Co-production. What makes this model useful in this research is the possibility it gives to split complex processes into discrete steps pertinent to public policies, but also into smaller and less formalized operations of problem solving. Moreover, it is helpful to focus on the interactions taking place at each step among the different actors involved in Italian-Yugoslav co-productions, such as film producers, workers, foreign partners, facility providers and state bureaucrats. We want to stress that the decision-making steps are not to be taken as a pre-determined path developing in a chronological order. The reality of policy making is a much less linear process: different stages often overlap and decision making frequently skips back and forth from one step to another, leading to continuous loops of implementation and reformulation. Moreover, problem-recognition or evaluation processes can often occur outside

of the public domain, and therefore can only be reconstructed by analysing subsequent steps in the cycle.

The second model we investigate through our analysis of film co-productions is the bottom-up approach to the implementation phase. Top-down perspectives tend to consider implementation as a process in which different levels of governance are merely tasked with the execution of policies that have already been set at higher, separate levels. Therefore, a different outcome from the stated goals is regarded as an error on the part of either those who formulated the policy or those tasked with its implementation. In bottom-up theories, the analysis performs what Elmore (1980) has defined as a ‘as an er mapping’ and starts from the last possible stage, that of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky 2010), who may encounter problems when implementing policies developed elsewhere. Problem-solving at the ‘street-level’ requires negotiating with other levels of governance or the policy’s target group, setting shared work routines that retrospectively become integral to policy formulation.

In the following two sections, we will examine the development of Italian-Yugoslav co-production in the 1950s and 1960s through a critical consideration of the policy cycle and bottom-up implementation models. However, we first need to briefly contextualize the formulation and implementation of international co-production arrangements shortly after the first Franco-Italian agreements of 1949.

Reconstructing the processes underpinning international agreements is a difficult task due to both the several stakeholders involved and issues surrounding documentation, which may not be archived or readily available. The signing of agreements is the result of cycles of meetings attended by representatives of state diplomacy and bureaucracy and of national film industries. Then, the implementation of said agreements involves the creation of joint commissions – again comprising of representatives of national film agencies, film industries, national banks financing film production and unions of film workers – which are tasked with

translating the policies into work practices, ensuring compatibility between the systems of regulation of the two agreeing countries and monitoring the balance of their financial commitment. Finally, officials of film agencies, such as the DGS, manage any proposed project, interacting with other levels of state governance (for instance, the Ministry for Foreign Trade) in order to approve the co-production contracts and later bestow a nationality certificate upon a film, which allows domestic producers to access state aid measures according to their percentage stake in the project.

Our analysis will start from the final stage of state bureaucracy and proceed backwards. The documents preserved at the ACS will allow us to reconstruct the work of the officials of the DGS, including their interactions with other levels of government and with representatives of the film industries, and to evaluate their impact on implementing the Italian-Yugoslav agreements. This research will allow us to fill historical gaps relating to other undocumented or difficult-to-evidence stages in the implementation process – for instance, at this stage of our research, we were unable to locate the minutes of the joint commissions – and to trace specific problems around currency, the nationality of technical and artistic personnel and territorial spending from the street-level activity of implementation back to that of policy formulation. Our approach is strengthened by the DGS's central activities as a top-and-tail bureaucracy in the cycle of defining and enforcing agreements, which become particularly evident if we look at key proponents of the internationalization of Italian cinema, such as Benedetto Orta, the head of the foreign office. Orta first signed the Italian-Yugoslav agreements on behalf of the Italian delegation in December 1957 before assisting the joint commission with their implementation. Finally, along with members from other divisions of the DGS, Orta managed and addressed problems as international projects emerged.

As the DGS pervaded every level of the decision-making process, the concept of street-level bureaucracy is here defined by its multifaceted role in this process rather than by its high

ranking in the state organisational chart. Although the DGS was involved at the highest level of state bureaucracy, the particular structure of the national film industry meant that the DGS connected the last step of policy making with film production by tackling such minute issues as disputes about film titles and the restaurant bills left unpaid by shaky producers, and the archival materials allow us to address a missing link between these two spheres of activity. Just as policy making, such as film aid, can affect production, including artistic and operational choices, the relationships between co-producers, the nationality of the talent and technicians involved and the choice of filming locations and production practices can pose problems that elicit a continuous formulation, implementation and re-formulation of policy by national film agencies.

A policy cycle of the Italian and Yugoslav co-productions

By scrutinizing the development of Italian-Yugoslav co-productions through the prism of the policy cycle framework, even cinematic collaborations predating the agreements can enlighten scholars about a phase of problem recognition and agenda setting that mostly concerned three areas: territorial spending for location shooting (at a time when the Italian film industry, like other national film industries, was adopting protectionist measures for the employment of its own workers), the international transfer of currency (hard currency such as US dollars but also Italian liras) and the attribution of distribution rights. A first example of Italian-Yugoslav collaboration generating friction between producers and national authorities is *La grande strada azzurra* (*The Wide Blue Road*) (Pontecorvo, 1957). This post-neorealist film was designed as a co-production between the Italian company GE.S.I., which owned a 60% majority stake in it, and the French company Play-Art. The latter, in turn, also acted as an intermediary between GE.S.I. and the Yugoslav company Triglav Film, which would have provided logistical and technical services for location shooting in Slovenia. As per the Italian

law concerning state aid for film, permission to film abroad was only allowed for special artistic or technical requirements, and GE.S.I.'s request was opposed by Annibale Scicluna (1957), vice-director of the DGS. He had three points of contention. First, location shooting in Slovenia was not justified by the narrative, which had an Italian setting. Second, and most importantly, the co-production contract stipulated that Play-Art would have directly paid for the services provided by Triglav, deducting the amount from the share of financial stake due to the Italian producer: the contract's terms would have greatly reduced the sum of French money to be transferred to Italy. Third, the deal between Play-Art and Triglav would not have involved a capital transfer, but the ceding of the film's distribution rights to Yugoslavia and the Eastern Bloc countries, which the co-production contract had assigned to the French partner. This created a *de facto* partnership with Yugoslavia, a country that, at the time, had no co-production agreements with Italy. However, these three issues – territorial spending, currency circulation and distribution rights – were only made problematic by Italy's position as a majority co-producer, as they undermined the balance of capital invested between the two partners. As noted by Scicluna (1957): 'it should be a French majority production in order to be approved'. The problem with the balance of co-production shares was solved when West German producer Eichberg Film entered the partnership and took a 20% stake from GE.S.I., which maintained its leading position from a management and artistic standpoint, but aligned its expenditure with that of Play-Art.

A second, more complex example is *La tempesta (Tempest)* (Lattuada, 1958), whose production started when co-production agreements between Italy and Yugoslavia had been signed but were not yet operative. The film represents a watershed moment between two phases in the policy cycle and a litmus test for assessing the major problems that emerge in the formulation stage. Initially conceived by Italian producer Dino De Laurentiis as an Italian and Yugoslav co-production, *Tempest* was then turned into an Italian and French co-production

made in co-partnership with Bosna film from Sarajevo, where location shooting was supposed to take place. This time, territorial spending was not a problem: not only had Yugoslavia just signed a co-production agreement with Italy, but also filming in a Slavic country was deemed a sensible choice, given the Russian setting of the film. Most importantly, 65% of the budget was covered by a \$975.000 minimum guarantee provided by Paramount Pictures, which acquired the distribution rights to the film on a nearly global level, excluding Italy, its former colonies and Malta, France, Belgium and the Eastern Bloc countries plus China, which were all assigned to the European co-producers.

The high profile of the project, which Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica likened to its recent collaboration with Paramount, *Guerra e pace (War and Peace)* (Vidor, 1955), along with Paramount's sizeable investment – about \$150.000 of which would have been transferred to Italy – helped to facilitate the green light from the DGS, and other offices involved, on a number of sensitive issues, e.g., the possibility of filming in Yugoslavia and currency transfers. As for this latter point, the DGS actively took part in a negotiation in favour of Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica and obtained from the Direzione Generale delle Valute (General Directorate of Currency) (henceforth DGV) – depending on the Ministry for Foreign Commerce – the authorization to make a currency transfer, the non-execution of which risked compromising the relationship with the film's Yugoslav partner, Bosna film. In fact, as per the distribution contract, Paramount had to compensate Bosna for its services in US dollars, but when filming in Bosnia went over budget and in a time when foreign currency circulation was restricted by European governments, De Laurentiis was forced to pay the difference.

This sparked a conflict between Bosna film, which asked for a further instalment of \$70.000, De Laurentiis, who asked permission to comply with the request, pointing out the sizable income of US dollars Italy generated as a result of its deal with Paramount, and finally the DGV, which categorically refused authorization to transfer US dollars to Yugoslavia (DGV

1958). In this context, the DGS (De Pirro 1958a) intervened to protect a project that it deemed to be of the utmost importance for the Italian film industry, pushing the governmental office to urgently approve, at the very least, a transfer in liras. Apparently, the final payment to Bosna film was only settled in June 1959, when the DGS asked the DGV to authorize the transfer of \$125.000 (or the equivalent amount in Italian liras) and distribution rights to the Eastern Bloc countries.

As stated earlier, *Tempest* entered production in a time when the co-production agreements between the two countries had already been signed, and its production history is parallel to that first phase of Italian-Yugoslav co-productions. Therefore, we think it is indicative of some of the problems encountered before the formulation stage and during early implementation. Moreover, because of its particular stature and huge production value, it likely served as a blueprint for a series of Italian-Yugoslav co-productions that closely followed it, not only from a narrative/stylistic point of view (which is not our concern), but also as an imitable production formula. The first problem it highlights is that of currency flow, which was a particularly hot topic until 1959, when the control of foreign currency circulation eased (Fратиanni and Spinelli 2001: 409). However, this case demonstrates how the issues of currency transfer and the transfer of international distribution rights remained points of contention throughout the development of Italian-Yugoslav relations. Moreover, the case of *Tempest* highlights the asymmetrical relationship between the two countries, further complicated by the role Hollywood studios played. *Tempest* inaugurates a pattern in which Hollywood commissioned and financially enabled a project, Italian producers took care of its artistic and operational management and Yugoslav partners acted as service providers: its seven-page provisional expense details provided in Italian by Bosna film (Kravić 1958) lists raw materials (e.g. high-quality timber for stage constructions, gas, pyrotechnics), the renting of land plots

for exterior shooting and finally, most importantly, the hiring of horses and riders from the Yugoslav army.

In this respect, the agreements signed in 1957 tended to correct this asymmetry through a principle of reciprocity modelled after the previous agreements formulated and enacted by the Italian film industry. Although the agreements conceded to both countries the opportunity to serve indifferently as a minority or majority stake co-producer, and even though they ditched the ‘twinning’ formula regulating collaborations with France and Spain – a system in which every majority co-production led by a producer from one of the two countries had to be paired with another project where the roles were reversed – the ‘annual participation of co-producers from the two countries has to be balanced according the possibilities of the respective film industries’ (Art. 6). Such an ambiguous clause posited a general balancing principle while allowing possible exceptions (‘according to the possibilities’) in consideration of the small scale of the Yugoslav industry in the 1950s (Goulding 1985: 32-38).

Delving into the first examples of implementation, the first two (and only) co-productions made right before the enacting of the agreements show how untenable the ideal of symmetrical Italian-Yugoslav participation was. Both *Il vendicatore (Dubrowsky)* (Dieterle, 1958) and *Agi Murad il diavolo bianco (The White Warrior)* (Freda, 1959) are historical adventure costume dramas set in 19th century Russia, following the blueprint of *Tempest*. Most notably, they were both conceived as majority stake Italian productions to be shot entirely in Yugoslavia, while, as seen in the case of *The Wide Blue Road*, most of the filming of Italian majority co-productions had to take place in Italy. While reviewing *Dubrowsky’s* project, an anonymous DGV official did not raise the issue of territorial spending at first and justified the choice to shoot abroad on the grounds of how difficult it would be to find an adequate number of horses in late 1950s Italy (Anon. 1958a), when the country was on the verge of an intense motorisation process. However, the DGV bureaucrat later remarked that an exception could be

made to shoot in a foreign location in order to ease into official co-operation, and that the association of Italian producers, ANICA, should better balance financial commitments in the future. When another project, *The White Warrior*, requested permission to shoot abroad just two months later, the reviewer again expressed a favourable opinion, considering that the operation did not involve a monetary transaction with the Yugoslav partner Lovćen Film and that ‘large masses of horses’ would be needed. Nevertheless, a handwritten note by General Director Nicola De Pirro, the chief officer of the DGS who supervised all these exchanges, stated: ‘If the next one will not be filmed in Italy we are quitting. It is better to let the Yugoslavs know right away’ (Anon. 1958b). This note was soon followed by a letter from De Pirro (1958b), who informed the Association of Yugoslav Film Producers (Udruženje filmskih proizvođača Jugoslavije) and ANICA that co-productions between the two countries were suspended until a majority Yugoslav co-productions agreed to film in Italy. Despite protests from Yugoslav authorities, this marked the end of official co-productions, but not of the cooperation between the film industries: Yugoslav producers continued to be employed as service providers throughout the 1960s for costume dramas, sword-and-sandal films, ambitious comedies and *auteur* dramas such as *Kapò* (Pontecorvo, 1960), *I compagni (The Organizer)* (Monicelli, 1963), or *Le soldatesse (The Camp Followers)* (Zurlini, 1965).

The examples of *Dubrowsky* and *The White Warrior* are representative of the negotiations that took place between three stakeholders: the DGS, ANICA and the Yugoslav film industry. The position of ANICA is the easiest to pinpoint. Managing a surge in production that heavily relied on exporting spectacular genre films, Italian film producers understandably wanted to lower production costs. A few years later, ANICA president Eitel Monaco tried to dissimulate this stance when he wrote: ‘It is by no means true that the producers of the many billions-worth Italian films which were shot in Yugoslavia, only wanted to benefit from the lower costs and wages: a true technical collaboration is ongoing’ (Monaco 1961: 3). The

Yugoslav industry wanted to continue working on Italian films in order to obtain foreign currency through direct payments for the services it provided or the cession and sale of distribution rights. We can imagine that this latter system was appreciated by its Italian counterparts, as it allowed producers to compensate for expenses incurred in Yugoslavia with films in their libraries, possibly deferred over long periods, rather than with payments in foreign currency. The case of *The Organizer*, an Italo-French co-production between Lux/Vides and Méditerranée Cinema, shows how the system functioned once it had settled down. The film production, for which we also have documentation on the side of the involved companies at the Archivio Cristaldi at the Cineteca di Bologna (henceforth, ACCB), started in January 1963, and as soon as March, the DGV authorized the transfer of the sum agreed upon between the Italian producers and the Serbian Avala Film for the partial realization of the film in facilities made available by the latter. The initial agreement provided for a payment of 27.900.000 ITL to be settled in convertible currency or through the crediting of liras to a foreign account. The documents show that it took Vides almost a decade to compensate the amount agreed upon and that, as partial compensation for the debt, Cristaldi's company transferred the exploitation rights of no less than 19 films to Avala over a period of time ranging from 1963 to 1968, until the payment was closed in 1972 (Vides 1972).

The Yugoslav industry was also keen on other potential spill-over effects, such as the transfer of knowledge. As Rolandi (2015: 135-141) writes, pragmatic international trade had long been a point of contention in Yugoslav politics. Moreover, the Yugoslav film industry aimed to gain a form of cultural recognition through its ability to cooperate with the Italian film industry, which, over the last decade, had gained considerable symbolic power through national developments in film style. In fact, after Yugoslavia's break-up with the USSR and especially in the second half of the 1950s, neorealism was adapted as an aesthetic model by many Yugoslav film makers (Pavičić 2008; Di Chiara 2013), following a broader pattern of the

globalization of Italian neorealism (Giovacchini and Sklar 2012) that characterized many, film cultures, especially peripheral ones, often under ideological pressure (Klejsa and Miller-Klejsa, 2021).

From a contemporary perspective, the position of the DGS is much more nuanced than that of the other players. On the one hand, as the production history of *The Wide Blue Road* suggests, the agency wanted to prevent the delocalisation of Italian film production, currency flow and film rights that could occur outside of a regulated framework. In addition, a co-production agreement with Yugoslavia promoted the post-war internationalization of the Italian film industry and the strengthening of cultural and industrial ties with a neighbouring country, one whose long-standing border conflicts with Italy had just recently been resolved. On the other hand, however, the DGS clearly did not want to finance Italian ‘runaway productions’ with public money, nor formally recognize a small national industry/service provider as an equal partner. By stipulating the filmmaking agreements and suspending them after two majority co-productions were fully shot in Yugoslavia, the DGS left Italian-Yugoslav projects in a middle ground between fully sanctioned co-productions and forms of sheer delocalisation of facilities and labour.

A further example might be helpful in clarifying the ambivalence of the DGS towards co-production. *Solimano il conquistatore (Suleiman the Conqueror)* (Tota and Mimica, 1961) is another costume drama set in 16th century Slovenia that was produced by a small Italian company (Produzioni Astor) and shot in Serbia, employing materials, locations, facilities and labour provided by the local company C.F.S. Košutnjak. Therefore, in the eyes of Italian law, it was a national production made in participation with a foreign company. However, it is worth noting that unlike previous examples, this film involved a major participation of Yugoslav artistic personnel, as it was directed and penned by Croatian director Vatroslav Mimica. Co-director Mario Tota (in his first and only directorial credit) and co-screenwriters Michelangelo

Frieri and Mario Caiano were likely only credited so the film could qualify as Italian; in fact, their total remuneration was about one third of Mimica's (Produzioni Astor 1961a). Thus, this was a film directed and written by a Yugoslav artist, with a British lead (Edmund Purdom) and an Italian cast, financed with Italian capital coming mostly from distributor I.F.I. Cinematografica. The contract between Astor and C.F.S. Košutnjak further clarifies the terms of the relationship between the two partners. First, for the goods and services provided by the Serbian company – again detailed in technical labour, construction materials, equestrians, etc. – the two companies agreed upon a flat fee of 90.000.000 ITL, compensated by Astor through the transfer of the global film rights with the sole exceptions of Italy and Spain. The sale of the film rights would, however, be handled on behalf of C.F.S. Košutnjak by an Italian intermediary, C.I.S.I. export, for a 10% commission. Second, film production would be managed by Astor exclusively, and the contract could not by any means be considered as a form of association or co-participation. Third, and most importantly, the contract states that 'In case of disputes [...], the parties shall refer to the Italian-Yugoslav Convention of 12 December 1957 for the purpose of film arbitration' (Produzioni Astor 1961b: n.p.). Although the collaboration with C.F.S. Košutnjak constituted neither co-production nor co-participation, Astor was still able to employ the 1957 agreements as a general framework and safety net in case of litigations. The strategy of the DGS thus allowed Italian producers to act in a grey area in which they could operate outside of the requirements of the agreements while simultaneously benefitting from the forms of protection they guaranteed. Moreover, such a strategy constricted the subordinate Yugoslav partners until the revision of the agreements in 1968.

We maintain that rather than being considered as a deviation from the text of the 1957 agreements, the strategy of the DGS should be regarded as policy re-formulation consequent to the problems encountered in the first stage of implementation. Before concluding, we will

provide a related example of bottom-up implementation to more extensively examine the processes behind film policy.

A bottom-up approach to implementation: The case of *Kapò*

The re-formulation of the filmmaking agreements between Italy and Yugoslavia can be tracked by mapping the complex approval procedure of the DGS in the period after the unilateral suspension of co-productions by the Italian authorities. The project of *Kapò* started in January 1960 as an Italian-Yugoslav co-production to be shot mainly in Yugoslavia for ‘artistic reasons’. De Pirro (1960a), however, soon blocked the initiative and in early February, Minister Tupini (1960) reminded ANICA that further co-productions were suspended until a majority Yugoslav co-production was filmed entirely in Italy. The DGS maintained its position despite multiple complaints on the part of the Yugoslav authorities, who wrote to Rome several times between March and July 1960 demanding the approval of the co-production deal, even calling for an extraordinary meeting of the Italian-Yugoslav joint commission to be held in July, a request which the DGS could not agree to ‘due to previous unavoidable commitments’ (De Pirro 1960b). However, Lovćen Film was still involved when a contract was composed on 29 February, and the project was reworked as an Italian-French co-production to be made in co-participation with Yugoslavia (Vides Cinematografica 1960a); then, in April of that same year, the film was once more reviewed as a Italian-French co-production (at least in name). Lovćen Film’s participation disappeared from the contract but not the film’s balance sheet, where the company was credited as a supplier of services for exterior shooting. Two elements from this process are important to note. First, a confidential handwritten note by Orta suggests that the DGS instructed Italian producers to present a third co-production contract devoid of references to Lovćen Film, and then to follow this with a separate distribution agreement with the same company:

[I] Conferred with the General Director [De Pirro]. [...] The Italian co-producers will make a new agreement with the French co-producer without mentioning the Yugoslav pre-sale contribution. In another application, they will submit the pre-sale agreement. In a third request, they will ask for the transfer to Yugoslavia of the sums necessary to complete production. (Orta 1960: n.p.)

On 11 April 1960, the Italian co-producers informed the DGS that on 29 February, they had offered the French partner a second, parallel contract, which did not involve any Yugoslav companies (Vides Cinematografica 1960b). Second, despite not being credited as a co-producer, Lovćen Film was paid with both a money transaction and the distribution rights for the Eastern bloc, as had been agreed upon in the original co-production deal, and nothing changed for them financially.

The work schedule sheets compiled by a Vides production manager also show that location shooting in Yugoslavia lasted much longer than the 37-day period officially approved by the Italian authorities: after 87 working days from March 14 to June 18, 1960, the payment to Lovćen absorbed more than a third of the film's overall budget (Vides Cinematografica 1960c). These data are of particular interest as more generally, they reveal the extent of the control process set by the DGS and its goals, not only in the case of co-operations with the Yugoslav film industry, but more generally in international co-productions. Such a process focused on the pre-production stage and was aimed at setting the boundaries of what could be labelled as an official co-production, at controlling the sharing of film copyrights and assuring that an adequate amount of working days took place in Italian studio facilities. However, it neglected the post-production stage and, although the Italian producers were compelled to

deposit the final balance sheet of the film, no one in the DGS objected to the excessive share of spending for location shooting abroad in the overall film budget.

Kapò effectively ended the Yugoslav film industry's potential exploitation of the Italian-Yugoslav agreements as a source of international recognition, especially through prestigious drama. It is worth noting, though, that *Kapò* has been included as a proper co-production in repertoires and histories of Yugoslav cinema (Ilić 1970; Čolić 1984). Not only was this film considered a prestigious project in which the Yugoslav industry was particularly keen on participating, but it also resonated with the themes and the styles of a few domestic productions that Yugoslavia was trying to push onto the international stage: in 1960, *Deveti Krug (The Ninth Circle)* (France Stiglic), a drama focusing on the persecution and killing of Jews in Croatian concentration camps, was screened at the 1960 Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Confronting and possibly exacerbating the Yugoslav film industry's inability to match Italy's financial capability, appealing domestic films and star value when it came to majority co-productions, the DGS relegated its so-called 'partner producer' to the role of a simple service provider, in turn re-envisioning Italian and Yugoslav co-productions as a form of runaway production. By suggesting a course of action, the DGS completed the implementation of the 1957 agreements, turning them into an empty framework that occasionally regulated, as in the case of *Suleiman the Conqueror*, a series of co-participations between Italian producers and Yugoslav service providers. In the case of *Kapò*, the DGS proceeded backwards from the management of contingent problems to the setting of new, long-standing rules of engagement. The DGS' reformulation of film policy can be evaluated from an organizational perspective so that it is seen as a strategic move rather than as a failure to properly implement the text of the agreements.

Conclusions

The case studies we have reconstructed through underutilized archival and secondary sources help to answer and simultaneously broaden the scope of our initial research questions. As far as the Italian film industry is concerned, the case of co-productions with Yugoslavia confirms the need for an approach that looks at processes (production, decision-making, management) rather than at final outcomes. For instance, if we had limited our selection only to films officially filed as co-productions, we would not have been able to outline a detailed picture of the interests at stake and the actors involved. In addition, our revisionist analysis tells us something interesting about the international positioning of the Italian film industry during the Cold War era, insofar as it shows that a flexible strategy of expansion was adopted. The agreements made with France, which were intended to serve as a model for other agreements based on the principle of reciprocity, were not replicable in situations in which the involved nations were unequal from an economic but also an artistic perspective. This means that, when working with a fundamental but, for various reasons, weaker partner, such as Yugoslavia, the Italian industry (understood as an entrepreneurial, artistic and bureaucratic complex) incorporated a scheme similar to that which saw it as a weak subject in relation to the powerful Hollywood industry.

In fact, from the 1950s to the 1970s, Hollywood majors entertained a multifaceted relationship with both Western and Eastern European film companies. On the one hand, they used European companies as service providers for runaway productions, most notably in 1950s Italy, when Cinecittà earned the surname of “Hollywood on the Tiber” (Venturini 2010); they pre-acquired the international distribution rights and thus co-financed the realization of local productions often starring Hollywood stars, as in the aforementioned cases of *Tempest* and *War and Peace*; finally, they directly produced films in co-participation with European producers, as in the MGM deal with Carlo Ponti that led to the realization of *Blow Up* (Antonioni, 1966).

On the other hand, in the same timeframe, Hollywood companies employed co-productions as a tool for establishing both diplomatic and commercial relationships with countries of the Soviet Bloc (Cambi 2017). In particular, they engaged (not always successfully) in film co-productions with the USSR (Shaw 2012; Siefert 2014), often using Italian companies as an intermediary, as in the case of *Italiani brava gente (Attack and Retreat)* (De Santis, 1964) (Pisu 2019). In this respect, the studio-backed Italian co-productions with Yugoslavia of the late 1950s could be regarded as an early iteration of this latter strategy. However, what we want to stress is that, with all the necessary distinctions of scale, production volume and durability, the Italian film industry used Yugoslavia as Hollywood had used Italian studios and facilities, that is, by exploiting the contrast/complementarity between technologies and skills, as well as the possession of natural resources and low-cost labour. To this end, the Italian film industry adopted a fluid system of international cooperation, in which formal agreements constituted a general framework useful for the management and ongoing negotiation of issues that went beyond the literal content of the arrangements.

This also prompts us to rethink, more generally, the way we consider co-productions and international collaborations in light of less-known cases dating back to the Cold War years, such as the Italian-Yugoslav case. While the exact system of relations between national film industries that existed during the Cold War is no longer in place, the problems of compatibility and mutual adaptation that that system presented concerning the interactions between industries of different sizes, power and internal rules still remain. The resolution of these problems is the task of policy makers, but a dynamic and backward-looking conceptualisation of them can be a challenge for scholars. Perhaps a mutual acknowledgment, based on an awareness of rules and historical processes, can be helpful to both sides.

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