

Television documentary production in France: Policy interventions and the assessment of quality

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The article delves into the regulatory framework governing the television documentary production industry in France. It highlights how public policies have evolved to support this industry, especially in response to the needs and actions of professionals. The article pays special attention to the reforms between 2014 and 2017, which favored certain non-fiction programs and influenced production patterns. The focus is also on the criteria for quality in documentary funding, emphasizing the concept of "creative documentary" and the various perspectives that shape French audiovisual policy. The article covers the economic and political history of television documentaries in France from 1986 to 2017.

Key Points:

French Support System: Documentaries hold a special place in French public television, benefiting from a robust regulatory framework, a comprehensive support system, and commitment from public service broadcasters. The primary funding comes from the state and broadcasters, with significant contributions from the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (CNC).

Quality-Oriented Rules: There have been tensions between professionals and broadcasters regarding the subjective rules for determining which projects qualify for public funding. These rules consider formal experimentation, cultural and industrial values, and the project's ability to convey information and knowledge.

Documentary Categories: French policies have led to the categorization of works beyond the traditional distinction between 'journalistic' programming and artistically ambitious films. The term 'documentary' also includes factual and non-fiction programs.

Television and Documentary: Since the late 1980s, television has been the primary financial source and showcase for documentaries in France. The national public channels, especially those of the France Télévisions Group and ARTE France, have been significant contributors to documentary production.

Production Sector: The documentary production sector in France is characterized by atomization and bipolarization. There's a vast network of microenterprises, which has been seen to favor diversity and innovation in documentary production.

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