

8 main conclusions from 3 years of research

The DETECT project provided scholars and students in the SSH, professionals in the creative sector and news media, policymakers and citizens with manifold opportunities to appreciate and critically examine how crime narratives in fiction, film and television are produced, distributed and consumed all across the continent, offering an engaging and critical representation of the social, ethnic, gender and cultural diversity that characterizes contemporary European society.

Through lectures, academic and dissemination publications, an online survey, public conferences, an exhibition, film screenings, a tourist app, a screenwriting contest and a variety of online texts, videos, courses and events, including a MOOC on European crime narratives, DETECT activities and outputs have proven to thousands of people in more than 10 countries why popular culture is a powerful resource to connect European citizens and foster their reciprocal understanding .

Out of these varied outputs, **we selected 8 main findings that offer guidance on how EU policies can sustain the growth and expansion of contemporary narrative cultures and traditions in ways that benefit the development of local economies and the transnational circulation of their cultural products.**

1. Crime stories across Europe contribute to the development of local CCIs and new forms of cultural tourism.

DETECT has revealed the existence all over the continent of a rich multitude of well-established local narrative traditions that have flourished during the last 30 years thanks to the universal, transcultural appeal of crime stories. These genre-inspired local traditions are intangible cultural assets that have uniquely contributed to the development of local Cultural & Creative Industries and services (CCIs), playing a significant role in promoting a move of TV filming from central production hubs to geographical peripheries, thus fostering a trend towards the creation of local creative hubs.

Among the local initiatives inspired by local crime narrative cultures, it is important to mention the remarkable dissemination across the continent of new forms of cultural or screen tourism, such as thematically structured itineraries based on, and popularizing, local narrative content.

2. The potential of European crime media products to circulate is still under-exploited.

Due to the universal appeal of their narrative structures, European crime stories, both in print and on screen, have shown to possess a huge, yet still arguably under-exploited potential to circulate transnationally, both within and outside the continent.

Nordic noir in particular has proven able not only to reach a global audience, but also to inspire the formats and styles of European, and even global, seriality. However, the European television market is still largely hegemonized by US productions, and Europe's linguistic fragmentation remains a key obstacle to the expansion of both the infra- and the extra-EU consumption of European audiovisual programmes.

Similar problems are faced in the publishing sector. While the increasing diversity on the map of European crime fiction speaks of the genre's transcultural value, our study found a sore spot with regards to the infra-European circulation of crime novels from both the Eastern and the South-Eastern countries.

3. The potential of VoD services to increase audience exposure to European diversity is still under-exploited.

VoD platforms are supporting and fostering the creation and dissemination of original RML (Regional and Minority Languages) audiovisual products. However, current discussions about RML media tend to disregard the potential of VoD platforms. New digital distribution channels are de facto not fully recognized as strategic to promote these diverse European idioms and make them more visible at either local, national, or international level.

Our study of also revealed major knowledge gaps in research about RMLs audiences.

4. Negative stereotyping of minorities and social groups is still an issue.

The crime genre's aptitude for realism and social critique, alongside with its universal appeal and potential for transnational circulation, has contributed to foster reciprocal knowledge among European audiences. Current societal problems—such as class inequalities, gender violence, political corruption, immigration and human trafficking, the activity of transnational criminal networks, to name just a few—are extensively represented. These narratives typically involve transcultural encounters between characters with different national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations. While the spectrum of these identities has grown wider, negative stereotyping of minorities and social groups is still in many cases an issue.

The representation of women in European crime fiction has undergone important changes in the last decades, with many series featuring female investigators in leading roles. However, classic stereotypes of femininity that deprive female characters of a full agency are still present even in the portrayal of strong, emancipated women.

A few ethnic, queer, disabled and neurodivergent detectives have achieved narrative agency in European crime stories. These positive heroes and heroines offer important identificatory figures for both minority and majority audiences and attest changes to the 'us' vs 'others' paradigm that long defined Europe's self-understanding. At the same time, a problem persists with the way in which these diverse identities are still too often represented according to patterns of criminality, sexualization, victimization and cultural homologation.

5. The North/South, East/West divides need to be addressed.

The two major strands of contemporary crime stories by European authors and producers, Nordic and Mediterranean noir, reflect enduring cultural, historical and economic lines of divisions across Europe. In particular, we found that while Nordic noir, as both a brand and a mode of production, has been instrumental in generating European co-funding for TV series, the same cannot be claimed of Mediterranean noir, despite its important cultural prestige. Research has also shown that complex media systemic factors put the North-Western regions in a favourable position, compared to the South and East-European area, to benefit from European funding, such as in particular from the support measures for the audiovisual industry in the MEDIA programme of Creative Europe.

Data indicates that the MEDIA programme's composition, as well as the goals to support cultural products with a European collaborative profile and distribution potential, have effectually incited a North-Western European bias. The new evaluation criteria of the current Creative Europe TV programming scheme have introduced correctives, which however would need to be further extended to significantly redress geographically imbalances in the attribution of funding.

6. The potential of cultural economy in Eastern Europe is still under-exploited.

Although a wealth of original content is being produced in Eastern Europe, crime stories from these countries are rarely distributed, translated, or adapted in other European languages. Due to their dimensions, the East-European countries suffer from all the typical industrial as well as linguistic limitations that plague all small nations in their efforts to develop their domestic industries and the international circulation of their cultural products.

Over the last decade, HBO Europe productions in this area have contributed in a significant way to improve the quality of TV crime dramas, causing an unprecedented mobilization of local creative talent in this field, similar to what has happened with Netflix in Spain. While this has had important positive consequences in terms of local talent development, shedding light on the potential of these markets, it also raises concern as to the real benefits in terms of original cultural expression, for especially HBO Europe has practically been able to colonize all Est-European markets through processes of format localization. Such a prominent role of global operators in these countries'

production environments raise concern regarding its consequences on local producers and opportunities for co-production.

7. Digital educational tools are today mostly provided by private platforms based outside the EU.

The teachers-researchers in the Consortium have experimented with a variety of digital tools for knowledge sharing, knowledge mapping and knowledge transformation.

This experience has disclosed problems in terms of the availability and local integration of 'smart' online pedagogical tools that are today accessible on the web. In fact, a large majority of these tools are today provided by private, pay-for-service platforms based outside the EU. This is just a small yet revealing finding in a more general picture that sees today practically all European universities still depending upon private services for their digital educational activities.

8. Although symbols of Europe rarely appear in contemporary European crime narratives, their Europeanness can be appreciated on different levels.

Symbols of Europe and its institutions appear very rarely in contemporary European crime narratives. Most of the stories usually take place in a remarkably local dimension, although disturbing representations of transnational, actually global crime networks are often involved. Only a few procedural series featuring supra-national police teams and organizations, such as Europol, have been co-produced in Europe in over 30 years, not always with encouraging results in terms of audience ratings.

While explicit references to Europe were not easily found in our research corpus, narrative and stylistic trends have emerged that allow to appreciate the Europeanness of contemporary European crime narratives on different semantic levels. Common narrative content includes the representation of transnational political issues (such as the migrant crisis or the survival of Fascist and Nazi ideologies in extreme right terrorism), the use of either infra-European borders or liminal territories with non-EU countries as narrative locations, the fundamental contribution of literature in providing inspiration for quality TV adaptation, and the increasing ethnic, gender and disability diversity of the leading character roles.

The DETECT Screenwriting Contest has revealed a wealth of transcultural imagination in the TV script concepts submitted for evaluation to an international jury of professionals from the creative industries. The remarkable quality of many proposals demonstrates that the younger generation of European creatives is only waiting for opportunities to express their cosmopolitan culture in original storylines involving the European territories and identities in novel ways.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Studying the transcultural significance of a specific genre of contemporary European popular culture like crime, in all its articulations of production, circulation and representation, has revealed several areas in which the EU could and should intervene to sustain the growth and reach of contemporary narrative cultures and traditions and their potential in terms of development of local economies, also through the transnational circulation of their cultural products. This ambitious goal can be pursued through a mix of actions on different interrelated levels.

Recommendations have been extensively exposed and motivated in **DETECT Policy Briefs**:

- [Creative Europe's Support for European TV Fiction Programming](#)
- [Cultural Diversity on VoD Platforms](#)
- [Cultural Studies and the Transnationalization of the European Higher Education Area in the Age of Digital Learning](#)

[Download the complete summary of DETECT project's main findings.](#)

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