

Kevlar Soul - Not one of those business as usual - productions

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In 2018 Ronny Fritsche, a Swedish producer and sustainability professional, was approached with a film idea by director Maria Eriksson-Hecht and scriptwriter Pelle Rådström. Kevlarsjäl (Kevlar Soul) was a story about teenage brothers Alex and Robin, who have been let down by the adult world, to fend for themselves.

In Fritsche's helm, Kevlar Soul ended up becoming an extensive case study for ecologically sustainable film production methods. This article is based on interviews with the filmmakers and delves into the process of "going green" and the challenges and lessons learned along the way.

Ronny Fritsche is known in the Nordic audiovisual industry not just as a film producer, but as a sustainability expert, who has been working towards environmental awareness during the past 10 years. His name is probably familiar to anyone who has participated in any film sustainability workshop, seminar or panel-discussion in Scandinavia in the recent years. He has been, for example, organising the manifest, where [250 Swedish film workers protested against the film industry's climate impact](#), written industry report [En studie i grönt](#) and co-founded the Nordic Eco Media Alliance "NEMA". Currently he works for the Norwegian [Green Producers Club](#) as the Swedish CEO and Country manager.

When Eriksson-Hecht and Rådström approached Fritsche with their idea, he was immediately captivated by the pitch and they started to develop the project together. From early on, Ronny Fritsche had a feeling that he didn't want Kevlar Soul to become one of those "business as usual" - productions. *"The film is about youth and giving them a fair chance in society",* he explains, *"and we cannot do this film and be true to ourselves if we do it in an unsustainable, unecological way - then we will destroy their future."*

In the story of Kevlar Soul teenage brothers Alex and Robin have formed a protective symbiosis in the absence of proper adult care in their lives. The strong bond between them is broken when Alex falls in love with a girl called Ines, and Robin, feeling abandoned, is sent into freefall. Alex blames himself for naively letting his first love distract him from his responsibilities towards his younger brother and pours all his effort into saving Robin—who may not want to be saved. This teenage story is carrying heavy themes of duty, guilt and atonement.

In Kevlar Soul Ronny Fritsche saw a chance to take his sustainability vision to the next level and test a holistic ecological production model in practice. "It motivated me to do a film with a social theme and also add this green layer to prove that a film -whatever the topic- could be made more sustainable" he says.

Fritsche knew screenwriter-director Maria Eriksson-Hecht from studying together at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts in 2009-2012 and making short films together. *“It was important that the director knew very well what profile I have, so it wouldn’t come as a surprise later”* he says.

Knowing that Eriksson-Hecht and production company Zentropa were backing his vision, Ronny Fritsche started building the production of Kevlar Soul as environmentally sustainable as possible.

Financing with an ecological mindset

When Eriksson-Hecht’s and Rådström’s pitch of Kevlar Soul landed in Ronny Fritsche’s hands, he already had a long-standing collaboration with Zentropa Sweden, where he had worked as a line producer and production manager in films such as *The Here After (Efterskalv)*, by Magnus von Horn, 2015), and *Another Round (Druk)*, by Thomas Vinterberg, 2020). Fritsche had also produced one feature, *Wasted (In i dimman)*, by Anders Hazelius, 2018) with a shared producer title with **Lizette Jonjic**, but Kevlar Soul was his first film as a delegate producer. This time Jonjic joined as an executive producer.

Moving Sweden, a fundin scheme aimed at first- or second time directors with low budget projects, granted the film a one-off development support, but when the script evolved, it was evident that the story would require a bigger budget. This led Ronny Fritsche to apply for funding from the main feature film support scheme instead. It started to look evident that the film would have to be an international co-production to reach a certain budget level.

Kevlar Soul project was selected to the Berlinale Talent Project market, followed by Cannes co-production market. After an unsuccessful funding round in Denmark, Fritsche turned to other Nordic countries. Eventually the film ended up as a Swedish-Finnish-Norwegian co-production, with **Misha Jaari** and **Mark Lwoff** co-producing for Bufo Finland, and **Verona Meier** for Storm Films Norway. Bufo already had some experience in sustainable production from Saara Saarela’s *Memory of Water* (2022) whereas Storm Film was more new to the topic: *“This was my first time where all aspects of ecological production were taken really seriously and where the main producer was really committed to set a standard in green producing,”* Verona Meier explains.

Sustainability was factored in the films funding applications from early on. *“An exceptional thing is the way this production was financed with an ecological mindset”* Ronny Fritsche describes, adding that he believes that the project’s high environmental standards created a quality in the project and attracted interest from the funders. *“I think that was a benefit for the financing - it made our project stand out in the very hard competition of other amazing scripts”*.

In the end, the development and financing of the film took almost five years, between 2018-2022. After 11 script versions, the project was greenlighted into production in January 2023, after which a happy surprise followed in the form of Eurimages support in June 2023. The total budget of the film ended up being a little over 2 million euro, which is quite moderate for a Nordic co-production.

Nordic film funders are still not asking for much ecological efforts of productions in general. According to Ronny Fritsche, funders responded positively on his ambition and sustainability vision. *"But they never told me that I need to do this"* he says. [Eurimages](#) (cultural support fund of the Council of Europe) was the only funding body that was asking questions in the application on how the production is going to address sustainability. Fritsche also acknowledges [Nordisk Film and TV Fund's](#) support: *"I felt that they really appreciated the sustainability vision, even though it was not an official requirement."*

Like Ronny Fritsche, both minority co-producers point out how the whole co-production system is problematic from a sustainability point of view. Funding structures fragment the filmmaking process into many different countries and regions, and therefore lead to more emissions in the form of travelling and logistics. According to Misha Jaari *"The problem is so big and so acute that it is almost a tabu. The system is built so that it does not take in consideration at all what a green production might need. It in fact does everything more difficult."* Verona Meier agrees: *"Ideally co-productions are as local as possible but unfortunately this is often not the case."*

Drafting the environmental policy

Studies [such as the country statistics from Finland](#) show that the biggest emissions in audiovisual productions come from travelling, accommodations, energy use, materials, products and utilities, as well as waste and catering. Overall, the Nordic countries have a developed infrastructure that supports ecological production. Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway [rank in top positions](#) when it comes to clean energy adoption and reliable infrastructure.

Ronny Fritsche drafted the first version of Kevlar Soul's environmental policy already in the early financing stage. *"It was stating that this is what I as a producer promise, if we get funding"* Fritsche says and adds: *"It created a great foundation, because it was read by Maria (Eriksson-Hecht) and Pelle (Rådström), and it made my work transparent."*

This early sustainability pledge was updated over the course of the production, and communicated to partners, financiers, and to the crew early on. *"It was an ambition to mention this in the early contact with people that should work on the project"*, Fritsche says, adding that the "green pledge" was written inside of production documents. *"For example 'no flying, we are taking trains' was formulated in the work contracts, so people actually signed up on this as well"*, he explains.

The environmental policy of Kevlar Soul was officially formulated in the pre-production "bible" (meaning a PDF booklet containing all important production information) that was handed to the crew in May 2023 and again as an updated version just before the start of the shoot in early August 2023.

The environmental policy consisted of 16 steps in the categories of travel & transport, purchases, food, energy and waste. The policy also included actions of communicating about the environmental work to employees, contractors, partners and service providers. The travel and transport section included actions such as acquiring the most environmentally friendly

rental cars possible, travelling longer distances by train or carpooling and avoiding flying altogether.

Purchases were instructed to be made carefully, using eco-labelled and ethical products, minimizing the use of single-use items and refusing to buy single-use plastic items. Circularity was an important guideline: All purchases (such as props, costumes or location equipment) were advised to be acquired from second hand, rental businesses or borrowed, and to be returned after use.

As for catering, it was stated that all food provided by the production would be plant-based, and striving for organic, seasonal and as locally grown as possible (with special diets taken into consideration). The energy section included using fixed power sources and requesting green eco-labelled electricity. The use of fossil fuels- powered generators was banned. Lastly, the production was going to recycle all its waste during all stages of production.

The crew was reminded to respect nature and the animals, and to constantly strive to improve environmental efforts.

Fritsche describes how challenging the business as usual- working model in Kevlar Soul and creating a sustainable production, was a great motivational factor for him. *"This was the first production where I was the delegate producer, and I felt that, okay, now I can decide where I want to put the bar here"* he discloses his motives.

Sustainable production design

Ronny Fritsche and Maria Eriksson-Hecht built their team of heads of departments around professionals who they knew from before, as well as some new acquaintances. Production designer **Sanna Öhman Spjut** was one of these "familiar faces", coming into the production from the request of Maria Eriksson-Hecht, having previously worked together with her, Fritsche and cinematographer **Josua Enblom**.

Sanna Öhman Spjuth has years of experience working in the art department in the Swedish film industry and she was no stranger to sustainability. *"I try to think of it and be aware of it as much as possible every time I work - this doesn't matter which project,"* she says. However, Öhman Spjuth had never been in a production where ecological issues were addressed to such an extent as in Kevlar Soul. *"As a production designer you are on board very early on. In all the different presentations, meetings, everywhere... it was made very clear from the beginning that sustainability was something that the production, the producer, expected everybody to be aware about and to be cautious about,"* she remembers.

The process of a production designer starts with reading the script and having discussions with the director, producer and other heads of departments, outlining the world, where the story takes place. Then the creative ideas are brought into a material level. *"To me, ecological production is something very positive and necessary, especially in my department"* Öhman Spjuth says, *"because my department in particular could waste a lot of resources. We are buying stuff, producing stuff, building stuff...and we could be using materials or different kinds of processes that aren't the best for the environment."*

In filmmaking a lot of the physical materials and resources go through the production design department. Therefore, just this one department could have a significant impact on the whole production's environmental efforts. In the Nordic countries film productions have been implementing a circular economy simply due to budget restraints: set design and props have been acquired from second hand sources and by borrowing and renting. At the same time “dumping culture” -where goods and materials are thrown into trash after the shoot- has been strong. This is also because of budget reasons: If nobody has the working hours to plan and execute the recycling of the materials, “dumping” is the fastest option.

For Kevlar Soul “*we didn't buy almost anything new*” Sanna Öhman Spjuth notes. She describes utilising a lot of flea markets, auctions, and the SVT prop house, and finding for example all the wallpapers used from dead stock places. “*Of course it differs, depending on what kind of movie you're making, and what kind of props or things or places or sets, you need to do, or find, or make.*” Kevlar Soul happened to be the kind of script that allowed this kind of circular approach. The props, furniture and other materials were returned to different places in Norrköping and Stockholm after the filming was done.

Öhman Spjuth talks about how the ecological effort may seem like a limiting factor but adds how the constraints can actually work in the *favour* of the project, unleashing creativity in a new way. “*The ecological option might not always be the most time efficient, the cheapest, or the most comfortable one, but it can be something that adds inspiration or originality*” she states.

"I just didn't have the balls to put it in the budget"

In the Nordic countries, there are still only a handful of professional eco coordinators working in the audiovisual sector - although educational institutions have begun to offer courses related to the topic. In 2024 the first 19 certified Nordic eco coordinators graduated from the [Green Consultant International online course](#).

The biggest obstacle in hiring an eco-professional in the Nordic film industry might not be the lack of finding one, but rather being able to fit the position into the budget. Kevlar Soul signed up an eco-trainee, **Jessica Tarland**, who had been working in the film industry since 2006 in the production design department, mainly handling props in various projects. “*In 2010 I decided to leave the industry, because I didn't want the lifestyle of a film industry worker*” she says, explaining how she then went on to study Business Development in tourism. But when Tarland saw the opportunity to do her business development training in Kevlar Soul, she felt she had to take it: “*It was business development and the film industry, so I thought it would be the ultimate thing to try out*”.

Even though Tarland was an experienced film worker coming into Kevlar Soul, the new trainee role didn't come without struggles. Tarland thought her traineeship would be about thinking about ideas, how to develop sustainability work within the film industry, but instead, she found herself doing very practical hands-on tasks, such as keeping track of the loading of productions' electric cars.

Tarland describes that the traineeship required her to think on her feet and absorb new information quickly. She had a lot of conversations with Fritsche as well as the crew and did research on various topics. But it was evident that the project would have benefitted of a professional eco manager. *"I just had to sort it out"* she says.

Tarland emphasises that stress and spontaneous decision-making exist in every film production, and how proper planning in pre-production is the key to achieve a good outcome - especially when ecological thinking is added into the mix. *"It was a tough ten weeks for me"*, she admits. In hindsight Tarland thinks that a closer dialogue about the tasks and expectations relating to the training would have benefitted the project.

Ronny Fritsche agrees that having only an eco-trainee by his side was hardly ideal. He describes the conflict, feeling that he couldn't cut the budget from the creative positions, in order to hire a professional eco manager. *"I wish that I were brave enough to prioritise money on a full-time position,"* Fritsche says, *"but I just didn't have the balls to put it in the budget. I just prioritised the basic needs."*

Fritsche describes stepping out of his producer role many times and taking the role of a sustainability manager. This happened particularly after Tarland's traineeship came to a planned end when filming was just halfway. Fritsche tried to cover the loss himself and stretch his role to take care of the sustainability issues.

The double task wasn't easy but Fritsche describes it as a source of motivation: *"Our film - like many or all film productions- faced extremely hard challenges"*, he states. *"When having problems with everything, you (as a producer) need strength and energy to fix it."* Fritsche explains that sometimes when he needed a break, he would go and spend some time sorting the waste, creating a tutorial video on how to charge the electric cars, or making another phone call to find electronic vans in the region. *"It may sound corny, but at those times I got energy from doing something for the environment - because sustainability was the value that motivated me to enter this project in the first place. It gave me energy to go back and fix the "real" problems in the production"* he says.

Co-producing without flying?

A *zero flights -policy* was one of the key points in Kevlar Soul's sustainability plan, even though it turned out to be a great challenge in the context of international co-production. Ronny Fritsche himself is known to be a producer who does not fly due to environmental reasons, and for many years he has promoted his initiative ["Festivaltåget"](#) - a campaign that inspires film industry people to take trains to Berlin and Cannes film festivals from Stockholm, by providing tailored travel instructions and nudging.

"Kevlar Soul might be the first feature of its kind that is financed with a fly-free workflow" Fritsche says. *"And the process of film financing is highly carbon intensive, because a big part of the air travel takes place before the shooting period even begins"* he points out. Producers travel from country to country to participate in different markets, co-production forums, talent labs, programs, and festivals, to develop the project, and to collect funding.

Fritsche contemplates that participating in many of these events might not always be necessary, but rather more about “keeping up appearances”. *“I was so lucky this was a post-pandemic year and both Berlin and Cannes co-production forums were online editions”* Fritsche explains, *“- so I didn't have to go there those years.”* Later he travelled to Cannes, Les Arcs and Berlin by train.

Due to the financing structure, Kevlar Soul had to have cast and crew coming to Sweden from both Norway and Finland, in different stages of production. *“We did what we could to find crew and cast that were sort of easily located and willing to not fly during production,”* Fritsche explains. *“But this didn't always work, and we had to compromise.”* The ambitious zero flights- aim was not met simply due to the fact, that the distances from northern Norway to Stockholm or crossing the sea from Sweden to Finland were not always possible to do without flying.

“Taking trains instead of planes to the shooting and post-production has been no issue for short and well-connected distances such as Oslo-Stockholm or Oslo-Gothenburg, Verona Meier says, “but it was more difficult and not very practical to arrange for longer distances.” Meier also points out the financial impact, which is simply that people get paid for travelling and the longer the journey, the more it costs. *“I wonder how for example the train-vs-plane plays out if a co-production is more spread out, let's say all over Europe or all over the world?”*

In the end there were less than 10 flights taken over the course of the whole production from funding to post-production, - a pretty remarkable achievement for a co-production of this size.

The travelling dilemma

The script of Kevlar Soul entailed one sequence where Alex and Ines travel abroad, and when the Danish funding fell through, the trip to Copenhagen was re-written as a train ride from Stockholm to Hamburg. The train shoot was done “in reality”, meaning that a mini-unit film crew actually hopped into the train towards Germany and shot the scenes during the journey. *“Business-as-usual would've probably been to shoot in a local train in Sweden and then fly to Hamburg to shoot there”* Ronny Fritsche says *“But I never even presented this as an option”*. Fritsche talks about authenticity; how the actors were experiencing the journey for real, and this brought something into their performances as well. *“Doing like this also saved us travel days”* Fritsche adds. *“It was a positive side effect and cost efficient way of doing it, since we could both travel and film at the same time.”*

As for cars, the production tried to use as many 100% electric vehicles as possible - also electric vans - but also this didn't come without a struggle. Even finding the cars was challenging at times: *“There was no supplier in Norrköping that could hire us electric vehicles”* Fritsche explains *“and not placing those costs into the area affected my possibility to give the area the spend they require”*. After some phone calls and discussions with the car rental company, the needed vehicles were arranged into Norrköping for the crew to use.

Supporting the team to use the electric cars and planning and arranging the infrastructure for charging, created a lot of extra work for eco-trainee Jessica Tarland. The user interface of the electric cars was still so new to many of the film workers, that Tarland ended up hosting a sort of "helpline," where people could call any time to receive charging directions and support for the use of the cars.

Sanna Öhman Spjuth admits that despite having a positive attitude to sustainability, the production design department had some struggles with the electric vehicles, since they had to drive a lot, and the range just wasn't always sufficient for their needs. *"It took time, and it was frustrating,"* Öhman Spjuth says. *"In the end we actually had to swap some of the electrical cars into diesel cars, because it wasn't possible to work (with the electric cars)."*

Despite the problems, the production managed to favor mostly electric vehicles - a detailed bookkeeping shows that in the end 60% of all the rental days were electric cars.

50 percent less emissions

The shoot of Kevlar Soul began on the 8th of August 2023, and lasted for 38 days, while originally only 32 days were planned from the start. The post production was done during 2024 in Norway, Sweden and Finland. One lucky thing was that the production was able to hire a Finnish editor **Mervi Junkkonen**, living in Sweden. This recruit saved the production a lot of flights.

As a part of her traineeship, Jessica Tarland made a comparison about the CO2 emissions of Kevlar Soul. She estimated how the film would've been done in a "normal way"- using diesel generators, fossil fuelled cars, eating meat etc. The outcome was that the ecological production methods had cut the film's carbon footprint by 50 percent. Tarland describes being a bit surprised, how good the outcome was, focusing on just those few key areas.

Ronny Fritsche is satisfied with the results of the calculation, but he points out that calculating is just a tool to understand where the emissions come from. The most important thing is to put effort on the practical solutions and actively choose operations with a smaller environmental footprint - which was the goal in Kevlar Soul.

Fritsche openly admits that the execution of the ecological production did not always succeed. As an example, he recalls the moment when he went to set and found that the diesel generator was turned on just to make a pot of coffee. Or how the crew members left set on breaks and went to a shop nearby and bought something to eat, when they were disappointed in the vegan catering.

Even before the film was finished, Fritsche started using the production as a case study in his sustainability lectures - so that others could learn from it too. *"It doesn't even matter if it ended up in a more sustainable way or not, but I'm proud of all the times that we raised the issue, and of all the discussions that I've had, where I have fought for "let's do it like this instead"* Ronny Fritsche states.

"It should not be that kind of struggle"

Jessica Tarland defines the three most important things in ecological filmmaking as having the right mentality for it; having a reasonable goal; and having the possibility to pre-plan things properly. Tarland feels that the film industry workers are ready to shift into the sustainable working model, but they're often not given the chance for that. *"I think people are ready to adapt. The only thing is that we work a bit too hard for it to be like a struggle. The film industry needs to be less stressed"* she says. Sanna Öhman Spjuth talks about the same dilemma: *"Film productions are always stressful, and there are lots of short deadlines...So the quickest and easiest way, and maybe efficient way, will not be so environmentally friendly,"* she claims.

According to Tarland the film industry still lacks the opportunity to make responsible choices, and that the industry suffers from short-sightedness, that is a direct effect from budgets that have been stretched to the max. *"It's too much about a second-to-second thing or a minute-to-minute thing; 'this is what we do now, but we didn't know that yesterday'".* This puts the team members in a constant state of alarm, which leaves little or no room for sustainability.

Despite experiencing some difficulties, Sanna Öhman Spjuth is very positive towards the future of sustainable filmmaking. *"There are options really for almost everything that could make it better, in all aspects of the job. So if there is interest, it could be possible"* she concludes.

Ronny Fritsche acknowledges that the film industry is just in the beginning of its sustainable transition, adding that in the perfect world it would have been possible to do the film with much less impact. *"It's actually very low-hanging fruit doing very much better than we did, if just the right kind of players would take the kind of responsibility they should"* he states. *"It should not be that kind of struggle it has been for us. We need a system that allows us to do this on a larger extent, that supports us."*

Bufo's Misha Jaari talks about how productions are many times all about financial survival, and how hard it is to fit green filmmaking into the picture. *"What we have learned is that it is super much more easy to make films with a 'green theme'. Memory of Water was an example of that, and so is our up and coming "The Squirrel"* he adds.

Over six years into making, Kevlar Soul had its festival premiere in Gothenburg Film Festival in January 2025. The Swedish national cinema premiere was on the 22nd of August 2025, with praising reviews. The film was also nominated for the EISVOGEL sustainability award. How does the producer feel now that the project is over? *"It was very satisfying and also a very strong learning process that gave me so much tools and arguing experience that I can bring to my work, and share with the industry,"* Fritsche concludes. *"I'm also a beginner here actually."*

Kaisa Astikainen is a doctoral candidate at Aalto University, Finland, with a research topic of sustainability in filmmaking. In Kevlar Soul, Astikainen studied film workers experiences in ecological filmmaking. The academic article on the research findings will be published later.