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### Article

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**Transitions in the Periphery:  
Funding Film Production in Greece since the Financial Crisis**

**Lydia Papadimitriou**

**Abstract:**

The article focuses on Greece and explores the extent and ways in which film production funding cultures have changed in the period 2010-2015. It maps out the hybrid modes of funding embraced by filmmakers in this period, and explores the extent to which new models such as crowdfunding were adopted, European co-production opportunities were more fully embraced, as well as how far traditional modes of financing such as, on the one hand, state funding, and, on the other, private, distributor-led, backing have persisted. As a country of the European periphery, and one particularly hard-hit by the recent financial crisis, Greece offers a good example of the processes of an uncertain, but also creatively productive, cultural and financial transition. Set within the broader context of global changes led by technology, the national case study illustrates how state and private top-bottom funding initiatives have begun to co-exist with bottom-up production and dissemination processes, and how some new players have entered the scene. The patterns revealed through this exploration of the new funding cultures for film production in Greece contribute to an understanding of the impact of global economic transformations on a national level, and help us assess the effectiveness and viability of the new funding models for small markets.

**Biographical Note:**

Lydia Papadimitriou is Reader in Film Studies at Liverpool John Moores University. She has published extensively on different aspects of Greek cinema, and is currently researching on film festivals, distribution, documentary, and Balkan cinema. She has authored *The Greek Film Musical* (2006), co-edited *Greek Cinema: Texts, Forms and Identities* (2011), and is the Principal Editor of the *Journal of Greek Media and Culture*. She has published numerous articles in books and journals, including *New Review of Film and Television Studies (NRFTS)*, *Screen* and *Filmicon*. She has recently co-edited a special issue of *NRFTS* on 'Film Festivals: Origins and Trajectories' (2016). She was an Onassis International Fellow in 2014-2015.

**Institutional Address:** Liverpool John Moores University, Redmonds Building,  
Brownlow Hill, Liverpool, L3 5UG

**Email:** l.papadimitriou@ljmu.ac.uk

The exponential growth of digital media in the last decade or so has revolutionized perceptions and practices of cinema. The prevalence of home and mobile viewing has redefined the audience's relationship with cinema, while producers have faced increasing challenges in financing their films, as traditional funding models have been put under pressure and/or become accessible only to a few. Despite the global spread of such developments, conditions of production and reception have varied significantly in different national contexts, as localized factors involving both state-driven and market factors have affected both the funding options available to filmmakers and the films' modes of circulation. This article explores the film-financing landscape in Greece, focusing especially in the period 2010-2015. This period corresponds, on the one hand, with the more widespread adoption of digital technologies from both filmmakers and audiences and, on the other, with the first five years since the impact of the global and European financial crisis was felt in Greece. The aim of the article is to identify the extent and ways in which the financial and technological changes of this period as experienced in Greece altered the means through which filmmakers have been able to fund their films. After a historical contextualization regarding established film funding options in the country, the article explores the three major responses to recent challenges: extroversion, solidarity and crowdfunding. The first two consist mainly of changes in attitude towards pre-existing options, while the latter has been enabled by new technologies. More specifically, extroversion refers to the intensified search for transnational co-productions;<sup>1</sup> solidarity is about filmmakers working in each other's projects without getting paid, or getting paid "on deferral"; while crowdfunding involves direct appeal to the public for funds via specialized websites. The article discusses all three options, but focuses mostly on crowdfunding as it represents the most recent and previously

untested funding option (especially in the context Greece). Furthermore, it is the option that is more closely bound to recent technological developments, and whose participatory dimension represents a step closer to convergence culture with its utopian and enabling potential (Jenkins, 2008); as such an exploration of crowdfunding in the context of Greek cinema provides a useful testing ground for highlighting the specific opportunities and challenges that its embrace in the periphery entails.

The article argues that no single alternative funding model adopted so far in Greece has emerged as sustainable, and/or able to substitute the established options, that is, private financing and/or state sponsoring. However, it also shows that, in the context of limited national-commercial and/or public resources (intensified by the ongoing financial crisis in Greece)<sup>2</sup>, a plurality of funding options, including crowdfunding, can contribute towards a partial strengthening of the Greek film industry, even if such solutions cannot resolve its structural or endemic problems (Karalis, 2012; Papadimitriou, 2017). The study employs mainly a qualitative, inductive, research approach supplemented by quantitative data from a range of national and European sources. It relies extensively on information provided through personal interviews, by members of the Greek film industry (film directors, producers and distributors) and by representatives of the Greek Film Centre, the country's main state funding body. By prioritizing a qualitative, empirically based, analysis based on specific case studies and interviews, the article situates the exploration of film funding in a broader cultural – and not purely financial - framework, identifying some of the key funding challenges and opportunities available to filmmakers in Greece since 2010.

Such a prioritization of a qualitative approach concurs with the global positioning of Greece as a small country of the European periphery. With a GDP value of 0.31% of the world economy (Worldbank) and a 0.68% contribution to the EU budget (Europa) (both as of 2015), quantitatively Greece may be simply deemed too small to matter for an international audience interested only in numbers. Similarly if considered macroscopically, both the financial sums involved and the films' audience reach, pale into insignificance if compared to behemoths such as the US studios with their financial muscle and global reach. In contrast to such perceptions, this article contends that a focus on the small and the peripheral is crucial for an understanding of both local and global production funding cultures, as it enables both culturally specific and more generic insights into specific funding practices and options. Furthermore, if the democratic and utopian potential of the digital revolution is to be (at least partly) enabled, small, marginalized voices need to be heard. Ultimately, by combining a cultural and economic account of the transformation in film funding practices in Greece since the financial crisis, the purpose of this article is to motivate marginally positioned creative agents to both embrace, and brace themselves for, the continuing challenges of globalization.

*Established models of film financing in Greece: A historical account*

Unlike its Balkan neighbors, all of which (with the exception of Turkey) used to belong to the communist bloc, the predominant mode of film financing in Greece until the 1980s has been private-commercial. Throughout this period, the state offered little to no support in cash or kind to film production, often using tax receipts from cinema attendance as a means to subsidise other arts - such as theatre - that were deemed more worthy (Sotiropoulou, 1989, pp. 64-65). Despite its antagonistic

relationship with the state, this private-commercial model flourished in the 1950s and 1960s and led to the establishment of the highly popular (within national boundaries) “Old Greek cinema” of genres and stars. The introduction of television in 1966 lured both audiences and filmmakers away from cinema, bringing cracks to an already strained industry, and leading to the effective collapse of the commercial mode of film production in Greece by the mid 1970s.

After a transitional period during which a number of art films - the so-called “New Greek cinema” - were privately financed either from personal savings or from rich cinephiles, the 1980s saw the introduction of a state-funding system for film production, which emulated similar models already established in (Western) European countries. During the 1980s, especially when the Oscar-nominated actress Melina Mercouri served as Minister of Culture for the then socialist government, Greek art films were generously supported by the state.<sup>3</sup> However, despite such state support, most audiences became alienated from Greek cinema in this period, while the critically acclaimed films of Theo Angelopoulos became the country’s only exportable brand (Karalis, 2012, pp. 193-212).<sup>4</sup>

Angelopoulos’ international reputation, transnational contacts and the increasingly high budgets of his films meant that he was the first Greek director to become involved in co-productions (mainly with Italy, France and Germany) from the early 1980s. The establishment of the European Cinema Support fund Eurimages in 1988 marked a Europe-wide policy in favour of co-production and creative co-operation across different European countries (Jackel, 2003, pp. 76-80; Aas, 2012, pp. 143-152). To date Angelopoulos remains the most generously rewarded Greek filmmaker

from the fund, having received more than three million Euros for his last five films (Eurimages).<sup>5</sup> Every year since its establishment (with the exception of 2008 and 2014), Eurimages has co-financed a small number of films with Greek participation - whether as majority or minority co-producers. While the funds allocated to such films are relatively modest (usually €100–200,000), the establishment of the fund has contributed significantly towards a change in filmmakers' attitude towards co-production more broadly – a change that became more evident in the years since the crisis, as will be further discussed later.

In the mid-1990s the funding regulations of the Greek Film Centre also changed, placing increasing emphasis on co-productions from either private or other state funding bodies. From within Greece, the prime candidates for participating in co-productions were television channels - both the Greek State Television (Elliniki Radiofonia Tileorasi/ERT) and the new private channels that emerged in the early 1990s after the deregulation of Greek broadcasting (Papathanassopoulos, 1997). The involvement of private television channels in financing film production helped reintroduce a popular aesthetic in Greek cinema, reestablishing genre after almost two decades during which Greek cinema had become largely synonymous with introvert aesthetic experimentations. The huge box office success of the 1999 film *Safe Sex* (Thanasis Papathanassiou and Michalis Reppas), which was co-financed by the private TV channel Mega and the distributor/ entrepreneur Papandreou AE, opened up a new era of lucrative private investment in Greek films (Lumiere). This continued well into the 2000s, matching the broader financial affluence of these years, before being suddenly halted by the advent of the crisis at the end of the decade.



The box office rise of the 2000s was underpinned by significant investments in exhibition outlets, especially the opening of new multiplex chains by companies such as Village Roadshow and Odeon. The rise in cinema attendance brought extensive profits to exhibitors/distributors which were then re-invested into Greek films with commercial potential - and to a virtuous cycle of further high returns (Papadimitriou, 2011). The landmark success of this era was the Village Roadshow co-produced *Politiki Kouzina/A Touch of Spice* (Tasos Boulmetis, 2002), which broke new records for a Greek film as it managed to combine high audience attendance, with positive critical responses and an international career (Demertzopoulos, 2015).

Aside from exhibitors/distributors, other players from the broader audio-visual sector also entered the film-financing scene in this period. For example, Yorgos Lanthimos' Oscar-nominated *Kynodontas/Dogtooth* (2009) was co-produced by Boo Films, a company that had been mainly involved in advertising until then (Papadimitriou, 2014a). Despite bringing international visibility to Greek cinema at a time of crisis and launching the so-called "Weird Wave of Greek cinema" (Rose, 2011), *Dogtooth*, nonetheless, was made before the financial crisis hit Greece. It was completed by early 2009 with a combination of state and private funds, all from within Greece, representing a financing and production history quite typical of the pre-crisis era (Papadimitriou, 2014b).<sup>6</sup>

Irrespective of claims about an artistic renaissance of Greek cinema since *Dogtooth*, the financial effects of the crisis on the Greek film industry have been negative. The most visible consequence was the significant drop in overall box office receipts, which went from €100 million in 2009, to €58 million in 2014 – only partly

recovering in 2015 at €63 million.<sup>7</sup> While initially affecting the exhibition sector, such a drop in theatrical receipts produced strong ripple effects for the rest of the film industry. First, it resulted in the serious reduction, almost halting, of private distributor-led investment in Greek film production. This was further compounded by the fact that the drop in box office receipts was much more marked for Greek films. Indicatively, admissions for domestic films in 2013 amounted only to 28% of those of 2008 (IOBE, 2014, p. 11; Papadimitriou, 2017).<sup>8</sup> Second, the impact of the crisis on trade reduced the need (and funds) for producing advertisements; this, in turn, impacted on private television channels whose income was directly dependent on adverts, leading to a further radical reduction of investment in the production of Greek television programs. The most radical drop in employment as a result of the crisis occurred between 2011 and 2012 when the number of employees in the broader audiovisual sector halved from about 4000 to 2000 (IOBE, 2014, p.13).

State funding also faced problems in tandem with the broader post-2010s financial and political crisis. Aside from budget reductions, the Greek Film Centre faced extensive structural and organizational problems in this period that led to significant delays in allocated funds reaching filmmakers (Kranakis, 2016a). Furthermore, the Greek State Television (ERT), the second most significant state funding source for films, was abruptly shut down in June 2013 by the then government, as a means of reducing state expenditure and meet the European institutions' demands for laying off civil servants in the context of the negotiated terms for the country's bailout (Athanasoulia and Shevchenko, 2013). Its abrupt closure led to problems with some agreed European co-productions, as these normally require a percentage of the budget to be covered by national state funds, which at the point of the broadcaster's closure

were (at least temporarily) lost. Notable was the case of the film *Xenia* (Panos Koutras, 2014), which ran the risk of losing its Eurimages funding - a situation finally resolved with the involvement of French-German broadcaster Arte (Proimakis, 2014). While a new, rebranded, state-broadcasting channel gradually restored film-funding activities, the election of a new government in Greece in 2015 led to the reopening of ERT and to the restoration of its role as a co-producer (BBC, 2015). However, the troubled state finances, the reduction of the public's disposable income and the broader socio-political instability had already put the sector under severe strain.

### *Dealing with the crisis*

The shrinking of the market in the period 2010-15 and the scarcity of state funds, as discussed above, brought many challenges to filmmakers in Greece. While some relocated outside Greece – such as Yorgos Lanthimos who opted to move to London, after facing problems in securing funding from Greece for his second film *Alpeis/Alps* (2011) - the majority stayed in Greece and tried to defy the negative odds. In this context, extroversion, solidarity and crowdfunding emerged as different – and often complementary - responses to the crisis. As opposed to crowdfunding, which introduced a new funding approach enabled by technological developments (and which will be examined in more detail in the following section), extroversion through co-productions was not a new practice, but in the years since the crisis it showed a marked increase.

Co-productions entered the European film financing landscape in the late 1980s through the establishment of Eurimages and a number of bilateral and other

transnational policies. Combined data from the Eurimages and Lumiere databases (Table 1) show that between 2011 and 2015 Greece participated in an average of 12 co-productions annually. Compared to the period 2006-10, which averaged 4.5 co-productions annually, and even to 1996-2000, the previous peak period, which averaged 6.2, the increase is roughly double. These numbers, however, combine Greek companies' participation both as majority and minority co-producers, so a closer look at the data would be more illuminating.

	<b>Eurimages</b> (Majority)	Eurimages (Minority)	<b>Lumiere</b> (Majority)	Lumiere (Minority)
1988	1	1		
1989				
1990	3	1		
1991		1		1
1992	1	3		
1993	2			
1994	5	1		
1995	3	3		
1996	5	2		
1997	3	2		
1998	2	4		
1999	5	2		
2000	2	2	1	1
2001	3	2	1	3
2002	1	3		2
2003	3	2		
2004	2	1		3
2005		1	1	1
2006		3		2
2007	2	2	1	2
2008				5
2009		1	1	1
2010	1		1	1
2011	1	1	3	7
2012	2	2	1	9
2013	2	1	4	6
2014			5	8
2015	1	2	1	5

**Table 1**  
Number of Greek majority and minority co-productions. The numbers listed under Lumiere *exclude* Eurimages co-productions. Source: Eurimages and Lumiere.

Looking at the Greek majority co-productions funded by Eurimages, it is notable that the support has been rather consistent, as from its inception, the fund has financed between one and three Greece-led films annually. Exceptions include the seven (out of the 28) years when no Greek majority co-production was funded; and the three years in the 1990s (1994, 1995 and 1999) when as many as five Greek films were supported. With regard to Eurimages-funded minority co-productions, these were more regular from 1994 to 2007 than since. In contrast to these data, co-productions beyond Eurimages (as recorded by the Lumiere database) demonstrate a marked increase in co-productions since 2005, and particularly since 2011. This reflects all co-productions, but especially minority ones. It is notable that in the last few years there has been a diversification of the national origin of the co-producing partners, involving a more extended range of countries from Europe (and beyond). This expansion suggests the increased awareness among many low-production countries that co-production matters not only in terms of raising necessary funds, but also in terms of expanding a film's international visibility. In this period, Greece has entered into co-production with many partners from Balkan countries (such as Albania, Bulgaria, FYROM/Macedonia, Romania, Turkey), from the Mediterranean region (Spain, Algeria, Cyprus, Italy), as well as ex Soviet republics such as Latvia, alongside, of course, the co-production staples, France and Germany.

Such extrovert tendencies are indicative of a broader change in the culture of film financing in Greece especially since the crisis and reflect, on the one hand, the shrinking internal funding opportunities, and on the other, the desire to forge transnational links that could potentially lead to cross-European, and even global audiences.<sup>9</sup> Film festivals (which are often supported by European funds, such as

from the MEDIA programme) have played a significant role in fostering such practices via networking and co-production forums, as well as pitching and works-in-progress competitions that enable filmmakers to present extracts of their films before completion, and find co-production partners and distribution deals. The Talent Campus at the Berlin and Sarajevo Film Festivals, Crossroads in Thessaloniki, or the Works in Progress in Karlovy Vary have been among the most productive platforms for Greek filmmakers in their search for international exposure and co-financing deals. It is worth mentioning here some of the new “extrovert” Greek producers who have been involved in European co-productions, as their names are beginning to mark the post-crisis film production landscape in Greece: Maria Drandaki (*Homemade*), Giorgos Karnavas and Konstandinos Kondovrakis (*Heretic*), Faidra Vokali (*Marni*), Fenia Kossovitsa (*Blonde*) and Amanda Livanou (*Neda*).

It is important also to discuss the role of producer Christos V. Konstantakopoulos (Falero House) because, unlike most producers whose usual role in the financing process is to seek funds from private or state sources, he has also been able to provide direct financial support for a number of Greek films since the start of the crisis. An established entrepreneur from a ship-owning family, Konstantakopoulos’ entry into the film financing arena in Greece has primarily been motivated by his love for cinema rather than its profit potential, thus giving his activity a certain philanthropic dimension. Indeed, in order to render his film-financing activities more sustainable, Konstantakopoulos has been involved with US independent films, having co-produced among others *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Jim Jarmush, 2013) and *Before Midnight* (Richard Linklater, 2013), while also planning further expansion into the field through collaborations with US distributors, such as Film Nation

(Konstantakopoulos, 2015). The portfolio of Greek films Faliro House has co-produced/financed so far suggests that he has actively contributed to the artistic renaissance of Greek art cinema, as it includes a number of multi-awarded and internationally acclaimed films, such as Athina Rachel Tsangari's *Attenberg* (2010) and *Chevalier* (2015), Lanthimos' *Alps* (2011) and *The Lobster* (2015) and Alexandros Avranas' *Miss Violence* (2014) (Papadimitriou, 2014a, pp. 126-127).

While both the number of (predominantly European) co-productions and the increased visibility of Greek cinema in international film festivals provide evidence of extrovert tendencies, at least for a sizeable tranche of Greek films, in order to top up the otherwise limited financial resources, a number of Greek filmmakers started collaborating and working in each other's projects in different capacities, in previously unprecedented ways. In her account of such practices, director and producer Tsangari refers to them as "solidarity" among filmmakers, adopting a term that expresses the spirit of mutual support rather than monetary exchange that has characterized aspects of the Greek social sphere more broadly in the early years of the crisis (Tsangari, 2016; Papadimitriou, 2014a). Formally, such solidarity can be referred as "labour capitalization" or working "on deferral", while it can also be conceptualized as an instance of a "gift economy" (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013). Calling it "solidarity", however, stresses the historical and cultural background from which the phenomenon emerged, as the term echoes a broader turn towards collective action that characterized the years since the crisis in Greece, as well an implicit culture of resistance to the effects of globalization (Henley, 2015; Anastasopoulos, 2013). In the film-funding context, such solidarity reflects the realization among filmmakers that unless they helped each other in various capacities they would not be

able to make films. Such collaborations included director Lanthimos acting in Tsangari's *Attenberg*, Syllas Tzioumerkas also performing in Argyris Papadimitropoulos' *Wasted Youth* (2011), or Tsangari producing Lanthimos' *Alps* (2011).

This DIY filmmaking process captured in particular the creative moment, around the start of the crisis, when these new directors were making their first or second feature films. However, it should be stressed that such solutions functioned *in addition* to a pre-existing financial basis, as a certain amount of private or state funds were already in place in most films produced this way, while the filmmakers themselves were able to afford working for a certain period without pay. So, while working on deferral and/or voluntarily can reduce production costs, enable filmmakers to complete their films, and enhance a feeling of collectivity it cannot be claimed as a long term sustainable mode for fuelling film production on its own terms.<sup>10</sup> Solidarity, therefore, can be part of a hybrid form of resourcing (rather than financing), especially in the context of independent cinema, that is when filmmaking is predominantly considered as means of artistic expression rather than an industrial activity, and ownership of the production remains within the small collective and/or is shared fairly by the producers. In commercial contexts, solidarity runs the risk of turning into exploitation – unless, of course, robust legal frameworks protect the rights of those who offer their labour (in the first instance, at least) for free.

*Crowdfunding for film production in Greece*



As a way of funding products by appealing to their prospective audiences/consumers directly and in advance of production, crowdfunding is, in some ways, an extension of the DIY arrangements discussed above. When production necessities cannot be covered via the resources or labour capabilities of the working team, appealing to prospective audiences has the advantage not only of increasing a project's funding base, but also of engaging new stakeholders. While crowdsourcing refers to creative and/or labour contributions offered by the public for a project to be completed, crowdfunding is about financial contributions to the same effect. It relies on a large number of people paying -usually small- amounts of money well in advance of being able to consume the product. The building of trust between creators and consumers/investors is therefore crucial for a successful crowdfunding campaign, as it fuels the latter's willingness to accept delayed gratification.

The principle of crowdfunding is not new: for example, filmmaker John Cassavetes famously appealed to the public on a radio show for money to make his first film *Shadows* (1959), and was then inundated by donations (Tzioumakis, 2006, p. 174). Its practice, however, has only recently become popularised with the establishment of a number of specialized Internet platforms, which enable global access to prospective funders and audiences. The two leading crowdfunding platform brands, Indiegogo and Kickstarter, were launched in 2008 and 2009 respectively. As Lucy Bennett, Bertha Chin and Bethan Jones (2015) have highlighted in the first academic collection of essays on the topic, the new opportunities that crowdfunding enables also raise a number of ethical, affective and power-related issues. In what follows, I will touch upon issues around ownership and open-access, the role of personal networks, and the relation between makers and backers through three examples of crowdfunded films in

Greece. I will also situate the practice in the context of the financial crisis and lack of alternative funding opportunities in order to show that crowdfunding has been crucial in enabling some very low-budget productions to be completed, even if the actual sums raised remain modest. While the exact number of Greek films that sought crowdfunding in the period 2010-15 is difficult to identify, those that achieved some success are in the single digits. Among those, the examples analysed below represent three distinctive and complementary campaigns that demonstrate the use of crowdfunding for film production in Greece in the first half of the 2010s.

Before the financial crisis, crowdfunding was little known or used in Greece: it had not been needed, and, in any case, it had only recently emerged as a (digital) practice internationally. It is perhaps no coincidence then that the first successful campaign was for a film *about* the crisis. The film was *Debtocracy* (2011), the first feature length documentary by journalists Aris Chatzistefanou and Katerina Kitidi.

*Debtocracy* is a political and activist film that aimed to mobilise Greeks to refuse the austerity terms of the troika of European and international lenders. The film argues that national bankruptcy would have been preferable to agreeing repayments for what, according to the directors, is an “odious debt”. The filmmakers appealed to the public for funding via Chatzistefanou’s website Infowar, rather than through an aggregating crowdfunding platform. Such a choice was possible because, as a journalist and political commentator with his own radio and television programme, Chatzistefanou was a known media personality with an extended network of followers. The campaign was very successful, as the directors collected the desired amount (about €8,000) very quickly and almost doubled their desired target (to about €15,000). The surplus funds were used toward their next also crowdfunded film, *Catastroika* (2012). Neither film

was commercially exploited: upon completion they were both made freely available on the Internet through a creative commons license, and subsequent showings in cinemas or on television (outside Greece) did not incur a fee (Papadimitriou, 2016, p. 471-473). In the case of *Debtocracy* and *Catastroika*, crowdfunding almost functioned like donations for a political campaign, as the audience was motivated by the desire to hear/see the makers' arguments on the issues. Chatzistefanou continued using crowdfunding for his next two political documentaries, *Fascism, Inc.* (2013) and *This is Not a Coup* (2015). However, unlike in the earlier films, he gradually embraced a more conventional exploitation path via film festival premieres and theatrical releases in order to partially monetize the films and enable different funding options for his future projects. While raising new ethical questions about these films' relationship with their backers (as profiting from the film is now, at least in theory, possible), such changes to access and circulation also point to the fact that crowdfunding needs to be complemented by other funding sources, including receipts from traditional distribution in order to be part of a more sustainable funding model.

If politics was the object and motivating factor behind *Debtocracy*, fantasy was at the heart of Thanos Kermitsis' campaign for his comic-book adaptation of *The Dragonphoenix Chronicles: Indomitable* (Indiegogo, 2011a and 2011b). A recent film school graduate, Kermitsis worked closely with Yannis Roumboulis, creator of the comic book and actor, to launch three campaigns on Indiegogo. While none reached its target, together they raised enough money to enable Kermitsis to complete his otherwise DIY film. Two campaigns achieved 18% of their flexible funding goal and the third only 9%: the first (2011a) raised about \$4,500 from a \$25,000 goal; the second (2011b) reached \$2,700 from a \$15,000 goal. According to the director, about

\$10,000 was raised overall (including direct cash contributions), which amounted to the film's total budget in cash – and most of it was provided by family, friends and genre fans (Kermitsis, 2015). A rather traditional exploitation trail followed: the film travelled to a number of specialized festivals, achieved a couple of sold-out screenings during the Athens Film Festival in 2013, and, through its Greek distributor FilmBoy, it also secured a week's theatrical release in Athens. Furthermore, in 2015 Kermitsis sold all international rights to Germany-based sales agent KSM, which means that the film now circulates on DVD, BluRay and is also available for streaming. Such trajectory was important for the first-time director to build his profile, and even get some modest financial rewards. Despite having taken place in the midst of the crisis, it is not clear whether and how the campaign's unfolding was affected by the broader financial crisis. Having been predominantly supported by his personal network, this is a good example of a campaign strongly developed on affective bonds and fandom, rather than broader socio-political concerns (2015, p. 3-9).

The same, however, cannot be said for Stathis Athanasiou's campaign for the "transmedia cinematic performance" *Alpha* (Indiegogo, 2013), a contemporary retelling of the ancient myth of Antigone, set in the crisis-ridden and Troika-oppressed Greece. Athanasiou's second film was envisaged as part of a broader experimental art project that included screenings accompanied by live performances (in ancient theatres or empty industrial spaces) and extensive web-based materials. The campaign reached €64,366, that is, 107% of its fixed funding target of €60,000. In contrast to the previous examples, Athanasiou's campaign engaged the services of the "creative marketing and communications agency" Opus, which, according to the

director, was crucial for its success (Athanasίου, 2016). Working closely with Natalia Katifori, co-founder of the agency and friend of the director, the campaign was carefully prepared for months before going live. This involved the organization of parties and gatherings aimed to familiarize the public with the general concept and practice of crowdfunding, planning the strategy for the campaign, drawing lists with potentially interested people to target and preparing materials for feeding it once live. Athanasίου was very effective in putting together separate marketing and creative teams who were prepared to offer their services for free in exchange for their company's or individual work's promotion. Just as the marketing agency worked voluntarily, so were the team of photographers, filmmakers and artists who were asked to follow the shooting and regularly upload photos and "making of" videos on the project's webpages. Similarly, fine art students and artists designed and produced T-Shirts that were offered as "perks" to those donating €75.

Such arrangements amounted to a form of targeted crowdsourcing, which, on the one hand, provided practical solutions to developing the transmedia dimensions of the project, and on the other, helped fulfill the promise given to contributors that they would participate in a collective experience. The project was presented as "much more than a feature film" and as having a "totally different approach to filmmaking as a whole", thus aiming to distance it from conventional contexts of film reception (Indiegogo, 2013). However, as David Gehring and D.E. Whittkower have highlighted, despite being overall more successful, when examined more closely, crowdfunding campaigns that aim to enhance "the feeling of participation in the creative process" (2015, p. 65) carefully circumscribe and control such participation, while serving to retain the author's autonomy. For all the para-texts that helped

package *Alpha* as a “transmedia performance”, the film itself remained autonomously created, and authored by the director and his creative team rather than the public, thus undermining claims to collectivity. The promotional campaign adopted on its release was hybrid, combining traditional competitive, experimental and open access modes of circulation: it premiered at Slamdance Film Festival and then showed at international film festivals; it showed in theatres and industrial spaces accompanied by live performance; and it also became freely available through the project’s website (via a creative commons licence). Professional advice resulted in the film reaching beyond the director’s immediate personal network, while the topicality of its subject matter enhanced its appeal. With 65-70% of the funds originating in Greece and 30-35% elsewhere (mostly Southern Europe) the campaign clearly broke national boundaries. While initially planned to cover 20% of the total (towards production design), in practice – just as in the cases discussed above - these funds were the only cash available.

### *Conclusion*

The three case studies of crowdfunding for film production examined above have shown that, despite the small amounts collected, the practice was crucial in enabling these low-budget films to be made. However, in all three cases the funds raised have been a fraction of the real costs of production, with the rest covered by the creative team’s voluntary labour (whether or not in exchange for media exposure), as none of these films had obtained other private or state funding. The examples also indicate the extent to which a successful crowdfunding campaign needs to engage the audience in something more than the making of a film – the sense of belonging to a community.

Whether provided by a common political goal (*Debtocracy*), genre fandom (*DragonPhoenix*), or access to a live performance (*Alpha*), this suggests that some projects are more appropriate for crowdfunding than others. A further example, Valery Kontakos' Kickstarter-co-funded documentary *Mana/Mother* (2015), a story of six Greek Orthodox nuns who run an orphanage without institutional financial support but only through the public's donations, confirms the importance of such (imagined) communities. In this case, the Greek-American director's links with the Greek diaspora in the US and the compassionate, altruistic content of the film's story were key factors for the success of the crowdfunding campaign, which nurtured strong affective bonds between the displaced Greeks and their distant "motherland" (Kickstarter, 2013). Overall, while not equally evident in all cases, the financial crisis enhanced a sense of solidarity not only among filmmakers who sought to support each other in the absence of sufficient funds, but also among audiences keen to back projects that needed their help while also expressing their hopes and frustrations.

However, according to Athanasiou (2015) such conditions were short lived: the persistence (and in some ways worsening) of the financial hardship combined with the growing number of projects seeking crowdfunding has made the public less keen, and/or able, to contribute. As a result, despite their relative scarcity, private-philanthropic, or even state options remain the main film-financing options in Greece at present. Veteran director Stavros Tsiolis' attempt to crowdfund his latest film *Women* highlights the limitations of this process (Indiegogo, 2016). His February 2016 campaign met with only modest success (14% of €60,000), and eventually the film was "rescued" by producer-financier Konstantakopoulos, who offered to finance it in its totality. This cancelled the need for crowdfunding (and urged the director to

consider returning the funds to his backers), while the campaign itself functioned as a form of indirect “pitching” of the film to the producer (Tsiolis, 2016). Regarding state funds, it should be noted that after of almost two years’ pause, the Greek Film Center has resumed funding film productions in 2016, providing some welcome liquidity to the struggling sector.<sup>11</sup>

Despite a number of filmmakers’ efforts to obtain finance and/or resources to make their films in alternative ways, including crowdfunding, evidence provided so far suggests that no sustainable model has been found. Solidarity is an ethical and political position, but not a business proposition. While co-productions remain a significant resource for both Greek and European cinema, but they fundamentally depend on the existence of state funding mechanisms to exist. Arguably, with regard to crowdfunding the picture is very patchy, as only few campaigns so far were successful in raising enough funds to lead to the films’ completion. It is likely that exceptional cases, especially if matched with a strong campaign, a social message and/or strong fan basis, will get successfully crowdfunded again in the future. As the digital economies expand and new business models that integrate crowdfunding with further monetization of audiovisual content through the Internet emerge, opportunities will be embraced by ambitious and innovative artists/creators in Greece - as elsewhere. However, in the light of such global changes, the very definition of Greek national cinema is likely to change, as well as the heuristic value of focusing on a national case study. The growing online consumption of movies produces and strengthens new group identities– and the national may or may not be among them. For now, though, and until such formations develop, focusing on transitions in a small, peripheral, national context such as Greece helps illuminate the specific



conditions of co-existence of residual and new practices in film-funding, and points towards some of the particular challenges faced by local talent in their search for ways to make their creative dreams materialize.

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow the term “extroversion” from an event organized by the Wharton Club of Greece and the Hellenic Film Academy entitled “Extroversion through Greek Cinema” (Onassis Cultural Center on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2016), which brought together members of the film industry with financiers in the search for new funding options for Greek films.

<sup>2</sup> The GDP value of Greece dropped from \$350 billion in 2008, to \$195 billion in 2015. Source: Worldbank.

<sup>3</sup> Specific state funding data from this period is not available, and further research involving specific financial arrangements would be welcome. However, the generosity of the subsidies during the 1980s is anecdotally well established (see Karalis, 2012, pp. 193).

<sup>4</sup> Among the few exceptions of domestic box-office successes in the 1980s were Nicos Perakis’ *Arpa Colla* (1982) and *Loufa kai Parallagi/Loafing and Camouflage* (1984), which were co-financed by private (Spentzos) and state (Greek Film Center) funds.

<sup>5</sup> The films, Eurimages subsidy amounts and dates of award were: *To Meteoro Vima tou Pelargou/The Suspended Step of the Stork* (1990): €596 902 ; *To Vlemma tou Odyssea/Ulysses’ Gaze* (1993): €686 021 ; *Mia Aioniotita kai mia Mera/Eternity and a Day* (1996): €503 082 ; *Trilogia I: The Weeping Meadow* (2001): €600 000; and *Trilogia II: I Skoni tou Hronou/Trilogy II : The Dust of Time* (2007): €650 000. Data: Eurimages.

<sup>6</sup> *Dogtooth* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival (May 2009); by the time it reached the Oscars (February 2010), Greece had already made several financial crisis-related international media headlines.

<sup>7</sup> Box office data from Christos Katselos (Greek Film Center). For tables and a further analysis of box office data, see Papadimitriou, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Notable exceptions of privately financed films with box office success in this period include *Mikra Agglia/Little England* (Pantelis Voulgaris, 2013), a doomed love story set on the island of Andros, which was financed mainly by an undisclosed shipowner from the island; or the films by actor-director Christopher Papakaliatis (*An/What if* [2012] and *Enas Allos Kosmos/Another World* [2015]), that combine high production values, star appeal and crisis-related subject matters.

<sup>9</sup> Other recently implemented co-production arrangements include the See Cinema Network, which supports co-productions across a number of South Eastern European countries (<http://seecinemanetwork.com/>).



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<sup>10</sup> It can, however, lead to cycles of films built on the aesthetics of low-budget, such as the so-called “mumblecore” movement in the US. For more, see Van Couvering, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Between August and December 2016, the Greek Film Centre approved development and production funding to the value of over €3 million for projects submitted since January 2015. The average funding for a feature-length film was €100,000 (with a maximum of €170,000). Source: Greek Film Centre.