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I would like to talk about public-private partnership, as Director of the Hellenic Film Commission, which is a directorate of the Greek Film Center. The Hellenic Film Commission acts as an intermediary between foreign producers of audiovisual works and the Greek filming community, and offers them guidance regarding incentives, permits, opportunities, and funding programs provided by the Greek state. We also mediate and offer our help when problems arise. Meanwhile, we mediate between the Greek filmmakers, the Greek filming community, and the policy makers, those who create the institutional framework, in order to make this framework more friendly and attractive for the filmmakers.

So, having in mind the nexus of the Film Commission's roles and responsibilities, it is important to note that it is a public body. The Greek Film Center is supervised and funded by the Ministry of Culture and Sports, thus an entirely public body. The Hellenic Film Commission's role accounts for its extroversion—it networks with filmmakers across the world, to advise and facilitate them. Therefore, our position is rather crucial, because we represent our country in major exhibitions abroad, in international markets and festivals. We are the “gateway” for those who consider Greece as a possible filming destination. And, in that case, we should be able to give them clear and, most significantly, honest answers to their questions. Because we need to always form trusting relationships. We often say with our colleagues abroad that a good national film commission is an honest film commission, which doesn't promise things that cannot be realized. So, knowing about the institutional framework, the legislation, the guidelines that apply at all levels, in order to communicate them to the interested parties, in Greece or abroad, is really important.

Moreover, since among our main roles is that of the intermediary between the Greek filming community and the competent policy makers for the establishment of an optimal institutional framework, the stance of the filmmakers' unions is of great significance. Producers in Greece are in fact very active, very experienced, they are unionized and in regular contact with the Greek Film Center and the Ministry of Culture, demanding a better institutional framework for their work. As Director of the Film Commission, over the past four, five years, I have come to realize that location managers should organize as well. Within the group of people who produce an audiovisual work, location managers are in charge of finding and ensuring the permits for the filming locations. Their role is really important, especially abroad. They are the first to discuss with the producers, studio executives, and creative professionals about a project, and decide where it is going, to which direction, territory, country. They are the ones who track the best possible locations for the script at issue. And, since their role is crucial in decision making, I think that Greece should invest in them, believe in the location managers we have—and we actually have great location managers—and help them, offer them opportunities for networking, skills development, and improvement. So, we keep on telling them to organize, to form a union. This way, their role would be further acknowledged, and it would be clearer to foreign producers that they can find strong production teams here, with skilled location managers.

This is why we have taken action in the past few years. We recently organized a workshop for location managers, and invited three great location managers from abroad—all three are board members at the Location Managers Guild International, which is based in Los Angeles. And we saw how many responsibilities their job entails, and so how important it is to invest in them.

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Now, when it comes to creating a dynamic for the effective partnership of public and private sector, we, as Film Commission, have to act as a “filter” between the private producers’ demands and the Ministry representatives, the authorities, that decide and legislate. For example, when the pandemic began in March ’20, and we had the first lockdown, everything went on pause, including filming, which restarted in May ’20, when the lockdown ended. And in the summer of ’20, in June and July, since Greece did well with coronavirus, we were among the first countries to host foreign productions. Instead of canceling productions due to the pandemic, we attracted even more than those initially programmed. Such an example is the film “The Lost Daughter,” Maggie Gyllenhaal’s directorial debut, which recently screened at the Venice Festival and received critical acclaim. It was filmed exclusively in Greece, on the island of Spetses. The initial plan was to be filmed in the USA. And finally the Greek production service company convinced them to come to Greece. Because the country was safe, the island was covid-free, and Greece had announced in summer ’20 the increase of cash rebate from 35 to 40%. Cash rebate is the most popular incentive in Europe at the moment, and Greece successfully implements it through the National Center of Audiovisual Media and Communication (EKOME) for four years now. And also because we have skillful professionals who can undertake demanding international productions—even from US or Hollywood studios. However, November ’20 and the announcement of a second lockdown came, and this was a really crucial time, because foreign productions were filming in Greece, and a possible interruption would be disastrous. Filming projects worth millions, planned months ago, would be at risk. So, our role was decisive. The Hellenic Film Commission and the Greek Film Center, through their representatives and directors, made it clear to the Ministry of Culture that they should demand from the health officials the continuation of filming during the second lockdown. And this was a great success, because we actually showed that we could rise to the occasion, just like other European countries which were in lockdown, yet filming didn’t stop. Interrupting the filming of a big production is a real pain chain, because contracts are terminated and you have to reschedule from scratch; the actors’ availability is strictly calculated. So, a rescheduling domino begins, which is costly and complicated.

The most exciting part of my job is to see how colleagues in other countries attract productions to their territories. And I insist on that, because the Hellenic Film Commission is a member of the European Film Commissions Network, in which I am a board member, and of the Association of Film Commissioners International, which is based in Los Angeles, USA, and has over 300 members from around the world. And what we realize in our conferences and when we share our know-how and experience is that some countries have really taken steps forward compared to Greece. To give you an example, for some film commissions in the USA, equal treatment and representation, in terms of gender, is part of the workflow. There are other cases in which war veterans or disabled people are encouraged to join the filming crews. And this is when you realize that Greece has a long way to go.

I wish to elaborate a little more on the issue of gender, which was always a sore subject for the Greek film industry. We never had enough women in key positions, in the creative process of a film project. And we do have great female filmmakers in our country. So, the Hellenic Film Commission, in an attempt to keep up with this need—which is not new, it was always there—went on to launch a location scouting support program. Meaning that we financially support, offering a fairly good amount of money, foreign producers who would consider filming their projects in Greece. And we invite them over, offering financial support for the location scouting, on the condition that they have already agreed to work with a Greek production company or a Greek location manager.

Apart from the eligibility criteria we have set, the participation of female professionals in the creative process—in the position of director, screenwriter, producer, location manager, and production manager—is positively evaluated and taken into account. And we consider this really important. Because, when foreign initiatives film their projects in Greece, we want them to network with Greek companies, to work with Greek professionals and, within these groups of professionals, to find as many women as possible.

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