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<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/22812>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Aitaki, Georgia: Becoming a Netflix nation: Extroversion, exportability, and visibility through a case study of Maestro in Blue. In: *NECSUS_European Journal of Media Studies*. #Open, Jg. 13 (2024), Nr. 1, S. 242–265. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/22812>.

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Becoming a Netflix nation: Extroversion, exportability, and visibility through a case study of 'Maestro in Blue'



Georgia Aitaki

NECSUS 13 (1), Spring 2024: 242-265

URL: <https://necsus-ejms.org/becoming-a-netflix-nation-extroversion-exportability-and-visibility-through-a-case-study-of-maestro-in-blue/>

Abstract

Christopher Papakaliatis, a prominent figure in Greek television, propelled Greece into the global streaming arena with his series *Maestro in Blue*. Supported by the National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication (EKOME) and initially aired on MEGA TV, the show made history on 19 December 2022 as the first Greek drama to debut on Netflix. This study explores the significance of such turning points for small television nations, analysing textual choices, production strategies, and broader significance for the visibility of Greek television on the global stage. As such, the study contributes to understanding the evolving landscape of transnational television and its implications for small television cultures and industries.

Keywords

streaming, glocalisation, transnational television, Greece

Christopher (Christoforos) Papakaliatis is one of Greece's most recognisable and successful 'television authors', and *Maestro in Blue*, his latest creation, is the series that managed to turn Greece into a full 'Netflix nation'[1] – meaning that the country is not only on the receiving end but is also represented in terms of content. Supported by the National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication (EKOME) and originally broadcast by private television channel MEGA TV, *Maestro in Blue* became the first Greek drama show to launch into global subscription video-on-demand streaming platform Netflix (on 19 December 2022), with the second season returning on 16 May 2024. Apart from a sign of recognition for the creator himself, the global launch of *Maestro in Blue* has been discussed as a potential turning point for Greek television industries and their representability in the global streaming universe.

The present study is located at the intersection of critical industry and textual studies, incorporating analytical angles that cover the business, aesthetics, and politics of screen storytelling and, thus, contributing to extant research that centralises the ‘disruptive’ impact of SVODs on production cultures and practices, as well as modes of storytelling.[2] By combining a textual reading of the first season of the drama series with an overview of its production context and a reflective discussion around the significance of representability for small television cultures, industries, and audiences, as well as for television studies in general, this article engages with three analytical dimensions:

- (a) exportability, addressed through a close examination of the visual and storytelling strategies potentially contributing to the appeal of the series to international audiences, including the importance of locations for narrative, iconography, and cultural specificity;
- (b) extroversion, addressed through an analysis of the creative synergies and production strategies orchestrated in order to resonate with a global commercial logic and (international) distribution, as well as to potentially activate additional market-oriented investments tied to cultural industries and other generators of income and employment, such as tourism;
- (c) visibility, addressed through a reflective discussion regarding the impact that representability in global streaming catalogues may have on small television cultures and industries, as well as television studies in broader terms.

Using *Maestro in Blue* as a case study of (potential) turning points for small television nations, this article investigates the conditions that make it possible for Greek television to travel (now), as well as the reasons why this matters – and to whom. As such, it offers an empirically-grounded analysis of small television industries’ engagement with developments in international media production and transnational television theory; it also discusses the drama series in question as a potential game-changer for Greek television (studies), thus contributing to a broader discussion about the pleasures, gains, and implications of international appeal.

Transnational flows in small television cultures and the case of Greece

While admittedly an all-encompassing and trite concept, the term ‘transnational’ has been useful in the sense of capturing ‘a series of assumptions about the networked and globalised realities that are those of a contemporary situation’, even though existing definitions are often unfocused.[3] As a phenomenon expressing itself, among other areas, in television culture, transnational television has been defined as ‘anchored in the nation-state and national media legislation, and [...] linked to the multidirectionality of flows and

interactions'. [4] The study of such multidirectional flows and interactions includes a wide array of concrete (social and cultural) processes 'with signifying patterns of production, distribution, legislation, aesthetic and narrative conventions, and media use'. [5] Additionally, it is complemented with enquiries that go beyond phenomena within cultural industries per se and include transborder flows in the form of media tourism. [6] At the macro level, such discussions have been anchored on broader politics of (symbolic and material) capital flows benefitting from expanding technological, spatial, and cultural qualities of the contemporary media landscape. [7]

While maintaining a bigger picture approach, the adoption of a transnational lens necessarily acknowledges 'the persistence of the "national" in various transnational constellations' [8] which has been most fruitfully and concretely theorised through the application of the 'small-nations approach' – a dedicated effort into looking at the 'challenges and circumstances' [9] of television cultures that do not necessarily benefit from the privilege of cultural hegemony but aspire to travel. The concept of 'television drama that travels' [10] (and particularly its application in the Nordic context) has – in its reflecting and capturing theories of transnational television cultures and flows – exemplified the variety of ways that otherwise small television nations manage to cross borders and reach wider, global audiences. An important lesson learned from the study of Danish television drama, for example, is that transnationalisation as an object of enquiry is not only to be sought on the level of production, e.g. funding conditions, co-production practices, and knowledge exchange, but also on the level of the text itself, as well as reception and distribution. [11] Specifically on the textual level, Hjort's understanding of 'marked transnationality' [12] as a conscious strategy of inscribing a text with transnational elements, for example with regard to themes, narrative or cinematography, has been a particularly concrete way of explaining how contemporary television shows manage to hit the right balance between being 'globally uniform and locally resonant', and by extension fulfilling the preconditions for attracting transnational audiences. [13]

Extrovert television cultures, such as the imperially-privileged US television or the regionally-fortified Nordic television, are characterised by production principles that are friendlier to international dissemination, as well as textual (narrative and aesthetic) characteristics that resonate across borders and audiences. Greece has been theorised as a small, introvert, invisible television nation, [14] meeting the criteria for classification within a framework dedicated to exploring challenges and advantages associated with media in small nations. Primarily producing content for domestic consumption with limited exportability and minimal impact on global television history, Greek television has not had a significant effect on wider European or global production cultures, aesthetic or narrative trends, or consumption patterns. Greek television's characterisation as an introvert

television culture enriches the argument around smallness with commentary around the overall circumstances surrounding cultural production. Greek television has not systematically exported content, be that because of lack of means, willingness, or ambition. Additionally, previous research centering on production cultures of Greek television fiction has also shown that the imagined audience is predominantly – if not exclusively – national.[15]

Finally, Greek television has suffered from invisibility: first (in principle), it is not accessible to international audiences because of linguistic or other limitations; and second, it has largely been absent as an object of enquiry both from domestic and international television scholarship. While Greek television cultures and Greek Screen Industries as objects of enquiry are gradually being established, through individual publications, special issues, and informal networks sustained by scholars based both in and outside Greece,[16] it is always a special and exciting moment when a new development coming from within the industry provides the opportunity to challenge the inherent introversion of the object of study and inspires critical discussions that, similarly to the media content itself, can travel beyond a narrowly defined national territory.

Netflix's glocalisation strategy: What do we (think we) know?

Netflix has been theorised as a transnational broadcaster that, through patterns of both continuity and disruption, moves content away from its national context and addresses, as well as shapes, global audiences. Transnationalism for Netflix, Jenner explains, is 'a complex network of practices of domestication and cultural exchange, of relationships audiences have with US imports and existing national media systems, of the internet and television, the national and the transnational'.[17] Such practices have been discussed through the framework of 'glocalisation' and a dialectic relationship between the global and the local,[18] as well as 'cosmopolitanism' and the subsequent 'loosening of ties between nation, territory, and culture',[19] with a focus on how technological infrastructures and affordances function as world-ordering:

It is no longer place but technology that determines the fate of stories and ideas, and internet delivery has loosened the ties between TV culture and national culture more than ever. By rendering TV cultures more cosmopolitan, global streamers are helping to bring about a new transcultural order.[20]

As global SVODs such as Netflix are not only distributors of content but also (major) funders and commissioners, existing research has been concerned with the ways that Netflix engages in 'practical glocalisation' projects[21] and enhances its cosmopolitan capital.[22] A concrete strategy is Netflix's investment in original programming, i.e. content that simultaneously targets local audiences and is accessible to foreign consumption, utilising its cosmopolitan aura in order to cross borders and become legible to multiple audiences.[23] While the term

'Netflix Original' is admittedly a confusing way to unpack the aforementioned strategy, scholars have identified the following ways that Netflix licenses and commissions original content: (a) Licensed originals, that is series for which Netflix has acquired distribution rights, typically from broadcasters, post-completion, without having made financial contributions to the production budget; (b) Continuation deals, that includes either securing a licensing agreement, encompassing global rights or specific regions, and supplementing the production budget or assuming full production control, often by outbidding the original producers following the success of initial seasons; (c) Involvement by either co-producing or co-financing content; (d) Full Netflix Originals, where Netflix commissions local independent production firms to develop content exclusively for the platform.[24] As SVODs are establishing themselves as important players in the European media ecosystem, commissioned and licensed content (and everything in between) forces television industries to renegotiate established routines and production cultures, allowing for an expansion of what is possible within contemporary media industries.[25]

At the same time, Netflix's transnational character has also been discussed from the perspective of media policy, specifically with regard to the European Union's acknowledgement of a rapidly changing media landscape – more concretely, through a discussion of the [Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#) (AVMSD) that governs EU-wide coordination of national legislation on all audiovisual media, including traditional television broadcasts and on-demand services.[26] The revisions adopted in the 2018 update of AVMSD, targeting mainly Netflix, included the proposition of a minimum 30% quota of European works in SVOD libraries, while additionally allowing Member States to require providers of on-demand audiovisual media services to contribute financially to the production of European works and to pay a levy on their revenue to support national television production (the so-called 'Netflix tax'). AVMSD also allows for the introduction of different forms of sub-quotas, even though these are slightly more popular in Member States defined by larger audiovisual markets. In Greece, the AVMSD was transposed through Law 4779/2021 and no further sub-quotas have been imposed to date.

At the backdrop of the aforementioned technological reconfigurations and policies, scholarship monitors flows and counter-flows closely but has not been able to identify a clear-cut, consistent glocalisation strategy.[27] Accounting for how Netflix executives explicate the streamer's logic does not make the endeavor easier, since their comments tend to reverberate the vague principle of glocalisation: the combination of the specific and the universal does not erase the 'national', rather uses it as local anchoring in order to be able to tell stories that speak to international audiences. Lotz quotes Netflix executive Kelly Luegenbiehl (then VP of Development, currently VP of Franchise and Spectacle Series) who describes Netflix's strategy as follows:

When we see that great local impact and the really authentic and specific stories, that's where they're finding the most universal, global audience. So the more local that we are and the more specific that we are, the more universal we actually are.[28]

Specifically with regard to licensing/commissioning and the case of *Maestro in Blue*, Netflix Italia manager of content acquisitions Veronica Vitali describes the series in question as exactly the kind of content that Netflix is looking for:

'Maestro' is a great example of... a show that feels very local, very Greek. But at the same time, it touches on universal themes like forbidden love, human nature, conflicts, family [...] This is what we hope will make people connect with it around the world.[29]

Unsurprisingly, the above quotes are not particularly illuminating; while executives in the entertainment industry actively pursue 'programmes that travel', they acknowledge the inherent difficulty in foreseeing the origin of the next global hit.[30] Consequently, some important questions still remain. What is it that makes certain stories stand out? What can a small nation and a television culture such as Greece bring to Netflix? Answers to such questions require a multidirectional analysis of both textual choices and production practices that define not only what kind of story is told but also how it is told. Jenner has suggested the concept 'grammar of transnationalism'[31] as a way to explain not only how platforms domesticate themselves, but also how television creators operationalise universality when creating content for today's glocalised markets, as well as what kind of choices are conducive to exportability. Drawing from Bielby and Harrington's understanding of what makes content exportable,[32] Jenner argues that Netflix's prioritisation of 'global-local' appeal (as it is expressed in the executives' discourse) is most precisely concretised as 'constructing narratives that decentre programmes away from the nation or culture of origin, forms of storytelling, with an emphasis on serial and series storytelling, attempts to appeal to minority audiences and programming decisions that often privilege international over national revenue'.[33] In addition, genre has been highlighted as a transnational marker,[34] as 'genre proximity' can explain some genres' – like dramas and comedies – ability to be shared across diverse cultures and audiences.

After introducing the case in point, the remainder of this article proceeds in examining how the noted forms of marked transnationality, evident in both storytelling and broader cultural production practices, can boost content exportability. This examination extends to reflections regarding the conditions of increased extroversion and their significance for small television cultures. Finally, the article engages with broader debates regarding the impact of media flows for audiences and television studies.

***Maestro in Blue*: Case and context**

Christoforos Papakaliatis, creator of the series *Maestro in Blue*, can be described as one of Greek television's most notable creators. He started off in the early 1990s as an actor and was particularly active as a director/screenwriter/actor between 1999-2010, with his series being widely popular and commercial successes – in chronological order: *Our Life, A Ride* (Η ζωή μας μια βόλτα, MEGA TV, 1990-2000), *Take Care of Me* (Να με προσέχεις, MEGA TV, 2000-2001), *Close Your Eyes* (Κλείσε τα μάτια, MEGA TV, 2002-2004), *Just Two Days* (Δύο μέρες μόνο, MEGA TV, 2005-2006), *4* (MEGA TV, 2009-2010). From 2012 onwards he entered the realm of cinema with two feature films, *What If...* (2012) and *Worlds Apart* (2015), marking his shift to 'political topics', including the social implications of the economic crisis, unemployment, and xenophobia, among others.[35] The first one was screened in international film festivals but did not manage to get international distribution, while the second one, starring Academy Award-winner J.K. Simmons, succeeded in securing international distribution and was released in 25 countries.

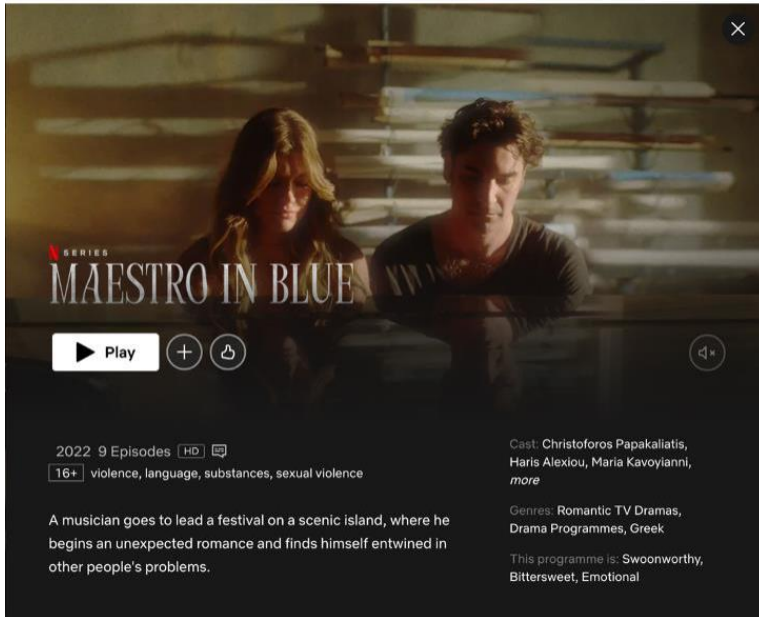


Fig. 1: Screenshot from the entry for *Maestro in Blue* in the Netflix catalogue, including a plot summary, information on the cast, genre categorisation, and 'codes'.

In his television work, Papakaliatis is popularly recognised as showcasing a distinct aesthetic (glossy) style, incorporating tricky/unconventional romances and intriguing love triangles, and having an affinity for titillating sex scenes. What is more, he is known for aspiring to

maintain full creative control of his series behind the camera (he is even responsible for curating the soundtrack) and for saving the protagonist role for himself. Drawing heavily from the genre of television melodrama, combining emotional dramaturgy with sociopolitical sensitivities, Papakaliatis' series are broadly characterised by an interest in topics such as social mobility, intergenerational conflict, and taboo romance.[36] At the same time, he is known for making aesthetic and narrative choices that are inspired and influenced by international audiovisual productions,[37] while occasionally openly borrowing dialogue, scenes, and plots from internationally-acclaimed films and television series – an 'accusation' that he has publicly addressed and somewhat de-dramatised:

Here we go again. This is an old question. So [...] I have never 'copied and pasted'. I always had references, yes, and these were to *Friends* that I was a big fan of at the time and there were many moments that were [included in my series] as references. But let me tell you something, after all these years, all these scripts, all these episodes, all these scenes and pages I have written, okay, if I ever wrote 1-2 scenes that had a similarity or were copied and pasted, it's not a big deal. I apologise.[38]

Maestro in Blue premiered on commercial broadcaster MEGA TV in October 2022, marking the creator's return to Greek television after eleven years of absence from the small screen. It was produced by Foss Productions (established in 1991), one of the leading production companies in Greece, with a newly-founded TV Series Production Department (launched in 2019),[39] and supported by the cash rebate scheme offered by EKOME. The series was also accessible through the broadcaster webTV, but it was geoblocked. In December 2022 it became available on Netflix Greece and Cyprus and was removed from MEGA TV's catalogue. Since April 2023 the series is available on Netflix globally. The original Greek title of the series is *Maestro* but was rebranded as *Maestro in Blue* when launched on Netflix in order to avoid confusion with Bradley Cooper's 2023 film with the same name that began streaming on Netflix on 20 December 2023.



Fig. 2: Screenshot from EKOME's Instagram account announcing the series launch on Netflix (19 December 2022).

Presented as a mini-series consisting of nine episodes, the first season of *Maestro in Blue* was mainly filmed across the picturesque islands of Paxos and Corfu. Centred around Orestis, a professional musician, the narrative follows his journey to Paxos to breathe new life into a local music festival. Soon, he finds himself deeply intertwined with local society and particularly drawn to a much younger woman, Klelia. At the same time, Orestis gets immersed into a wider nexus of secrets and lies that seem to be part of the fabric of island life. Throughout the series, pressing issues related to the painful consequences of hetero-patriarchy, such as homophobia, domestic abuse, and corruption are illuminated, often through the unique perspective of the main characters.

Exportability, or the importance of 'speaking the right language'

In locating the conditions behind the heightened exportability of Nordic stories, Eichner and Mikos argue that one needs to adopt an all-round perspective that includes the media product itself (i.e. narration, aesthetics, and characters), the level of production (i.e.

production philosophies, strategies, and practices), and audience perspectives (i.e. questions around relatability).[40] Specifically when it comes to textual features on the level of the product itself, narrative and aesthetic choices can be understood as conscious creative choices that do not only guide meaning-making but also potentially increase the exportability of a product. In other words, the production of a television series entails strategic choices that provide the product with a visual and narrative grammar (of transnationalism) that speaks to both domestic and international audiences. In *Maestro in Blue*, those strategic choices are primarily located in storytelling, locations, and generic hybridity.

While casting choices and an ensemble consisting of talented established and young(er) actors has been noted as one of the strengths of the series,[41] it is the mode of storytelling employed for the unfolding of the story that can be identified as one of the major links between the series and a potential international audience. The packaging of season 1 in nine episodes corresponds to the recent trend of the mini-series format and works well in terms of offering a low-stakes way for easily distracted television viewers to get immersed in scripted drama.[42] This tactic further enhances the suspense and leaves audiences eager for more. Since every episode focuses on one character and their perspective, all main characters get the time they need to tell their own stories, which in most cases proves to be a crucial factor in revealing the deeper motives for their behaviour. The series also makes extensive use of flashbacks; such interjected scenes are efficiently managing the on-screen time in order to reveal backstories in a way that lends diversity to the visual aesthetics while at the same time enriching the story with important pieces of the puzzle.

Furthermore, exportability is enhanced by means of the strategic use of locations, including landscapes, local colours, and lights. Locations, in the sense of settings where the action takes place and the story unfolds, is not a neutral background; *Maestro in Blue* is not placeless. Rather, locations are a flexible semiotic resource that taps into different genres and thus generates different meanings. Locations therefore contribute to romantic settings fuelling the love affair between a charming, going-through-mid-life-crisis Orestis and stunning, conveniently-just-above-legal-age Klelia which is in line with Papakaliatis' signature preference for complex, unconventional or taboo liaisons. The island settings also reiterate more universal conventions centred around island idyll, as an exotic, idealising space where everything and anything can happen, reproducing stereotypical representations of Greece and Greek summer. This is particularly activated in the scenes that involve the two protagonists; filtered through the tourist gaze, the locations, the sea, the nature, and the skies contribute to putting together the perfect background for a dreamy, summer romance, thus making the series more legible to international audiences.

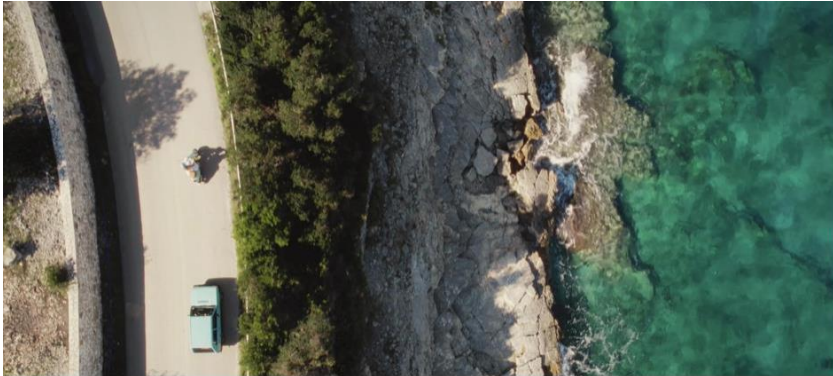


Fig. 3: Screenshot from the first episode of the series *Maestro in Blue*, titled 'Clair de Lune', indicative of the series' colour palette (source: imdb.com).

Interestingly enough, the locations do not trap the country's imaginary in a realm of idealised romance; rather they confirm islands in visual culture as 'conflictual tropes' and ambiguous spaces that test the imagination and activate multiple ways of being and seeing, including tensions between the local and the global.[43] In combination with that, the series also incorporates transnational markers in the form of visual languages that pay homage to popular television and film genres, such as noir aesthetics, a popular trend in contemporary European television, and the visual style of the 'Greek weird wave', characterised by surrealist, dystopian-style optics popularised by the films of Yorgos Lanthimos. As such, the landscapes provide an opportunity for the male protagonist to go through a journey of redefining who he is as he, throughout the series, reflects upon unfulfilled dreams, compromising, losing one's ideological and emotional compass, and ageing. This attempt to communicate failures and disappointments in one's life is done with a nod to one of the most popular and exportable visual strategies that Greek screen industries have produced in the last few years: 'weirdness'. In the episode that focuses on the character of Orestis, an interjected scene brimming with visual metaphors organised around a game of 'musical chairs' among upper-class individuals turns into a raw, splatter scene, aiming to convey Orestis' resentment for the rotten value system that he once embraced. Adopting a visual language that probably stunned his loyal followers, the series is infused with markers of 'weirdness' but also aligned with the so called 'politics of weirdness', in the sense of critiquing 'the intertwined meanings of capitalism, (Greek) nationalism and patriarchy'.[44]

In parallel with the love story, the protagonists are also directly or indirectly involved in a murder of a local man and in a number of other illegal activities, including money laundering. A versatile use of lighting and colour inspired by the waters, skies, and landscapes of the Mediterranean Sea is used in this case, lending a noir ambiance to the series, albeit with a Southern flavour. So instead of the blacks, greys, and browns defining the palette of Nordic

noir, we can register an extensive use of Mediterranean noir colours, including ‘gaudy yellows, reds, ochres, and above all blues’,[45] all contributing to a story of a ‘darker Greece, hidden in the shadows that become sharper when contrasted with the burning sun’.[46] As such, genre, in combination with the aforementioned visual choices in terms of narrative and aesthetics, works in favour of exportability, by creating a transnational aura.

Extroversion, or the importance of conjunctures

Exportability, as a quality found in transnationally-sensitised storytelling and aesthetics, is a significant but not all-powerful prerequisite for transnational address. A closer examination of the conditions and circumstances that potentially foster a more extroverted attitude for media content is necessary. The type of extroversion adopted here as an analytical term exceeds ‘the active search for funding and production partners beyond the traditional state and private options, and towards international co-productions’,[47] a concept more commonly associated with Greek film production. It encompasses broader creative synergies and production approaches aimed at aligning with a transnational mindset and global distribution, (potentially) stimulating additional market-driven investments linked to cultural industries and other sources of income and employment, such as tourism.

One of the factors that has contributed to a more extroverted character for Greek film and television production in recent years is the establishment of EKOME, the National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication. EKOME was founded by Law 4339/2015 under the Ministry of Digital Policy Telecommunications and Media and is currently under the purview of the Ministry of Digital Governance. Commencing its activities in December 2017, EKOME functions as a legal entity governed by private law, overseen by the Ministry of Digital Governance, and is tasked with a specific mission: ‘To foster and promote public and private initiatives, foreign and domestic, in all sectors of the audiovisual industry.’[48] EKOME has been credited as decisively contributing to a rejuvenation of Greek television fiction,[49] by subsidising both original series and revivals, such as *Wild Bees* (Άγριες Μέλισσες, ANT1, 2019-2022) and *Word of Honor: Twenty Years Later* (Λόγω Τιμής: Είκοσι Χρόνια Μετά, SKAI, 2019) respectively.

Maestro in Blue was supported by the Greek cash rebate of EKOME, a scheme focusing on both encouraging investment in international productions and on stimulating national productions. In line with the updated legislation (Law 4704/2020) raising the cash rebate on eligible expenses incurred in Greece from 35% to 40%, *Maestro in Blue* received a rebate amounting to 927,428 Euros (total eligible expenses: 2,318,570 Euros). While exemplifying the valuable role of funding schemes in incentivising and supporting efforts towards

internationalisation, as well as boosting budgets – and by extension the quality – of Greek-produced series.[50] the case of *Maestro in Blue* reveals the importance of wider synergies necessary for activating an extroverted outlook. As Papakaliatis explains in an interview with Greek magazine *Gala*:

[Netflix] brought the money through which MEGA will break even. *Maestro*, for the standards of our market, is a very expensive production that, even with EKOME's support, wouldn't be financially sustainable. And it's honorable that MEGA and its president gave the green light for providing the budget needed for the series. Netflix came in later and the channel managed to recoup. Right now, everyone has been paid well, without the channel suffering financial loss. Nobody made crazy profit out of this and, besides how could one, since this is the first time that something like this is happening. The same goes for Foss [Productions] and Stelios Kotionis [co-owner of Foss Productions] who pulled a lot of weight and, undertaking costs and risks, supported and completed this project.[51]

In an attempt to further unpack the significance of extroversion as a production strategy, it is worth considering the work of EKOME beyond financial incentives. As one of the goals of EKOME is 'to make the country the most attractive and safe destination for the realisation of audiovisual productions',[52] successful examples such as *Maestro in Blue* function as advertising for both the financial possibilities available to domestic and international productions and as promoters of the physical landscapes and local colours that the country has to offer. What is more, productions that incorporate more extroverted qualities can be used as strategic tools to attract tourists. This is further reiterated through the close ties between EKOME and The Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO), as well as the recent (12 January 2023) signing of a Memorandum of Understanding 'with the purpose to design and implement joint actions that highlight their work, promote Greek tourism and the domestic audiovisual sector abroad through targeted actions in international exhibitions and markets, and develop a specific framework that will establish the country as an attractive destination for investment in the audiovisual production'.[53] According to the subsequent press release, President and CEO of EKOME, Panagiotis Kouanis, welcomed the Memorandum, noting that 'by joining forces and with the exchange of know-how between two predominantly extrovert bodies, we further strengthen the brand name "Greece", and promote the Greek tourism product in top positions internationally, especially through the audiovisual production process'.[54] Additionally, GNTO President Angela Gerekou further supported the idea that film and television can boost travel to Greek destinations, stressing that '[t]hese productions even surpass the influence of social media, while TV series in particular are considered equivalent to vacation spot recommendations from friends and family'.[55]

By securing international distribution through Netflix, it is not only the series itself that gets the chance to reach a wider audience, but also the production partners, as well as the wider national context. EKOME enriches its portfolio with a series that has succeeded in attracting international attention, with the latter functioning as a testimony of the country's newly-founded audiovisual strategy driven by ambition and extroversion. At the same time, such

developments work in favour of further enhancing the country's geocultural capital, 'a kind of cultural capital or achievement of status embodied by places rather than people' that '[...] affords nations, regions, and cities opportunities to shape and participate in various global cultural economies of media, fashion, art, and so on'. [56] Consequently, cases such as *Maestro in Blue* provide good opportunities for small(er) countries to renegotiate their position within broader industrial and cultural power dynamics, not least by means of media tourism, i.e. the phenomenon of people travelling to places because of associations with media and popular culture products, such as films, television series, novels, songs, etc. [57] Locations (and their representations) become important tools for promoting and even constructing tourist destinations, in the sense of directing tourist flows towards places that are not necessarily particularly well-known or popular to foreign audiences and potential visitors. Extroversion can therefore be conceptualised as both encompassing multi-layered intersections between popular culture and various mobilities, place-making, destination decision-making, and tourist experience.

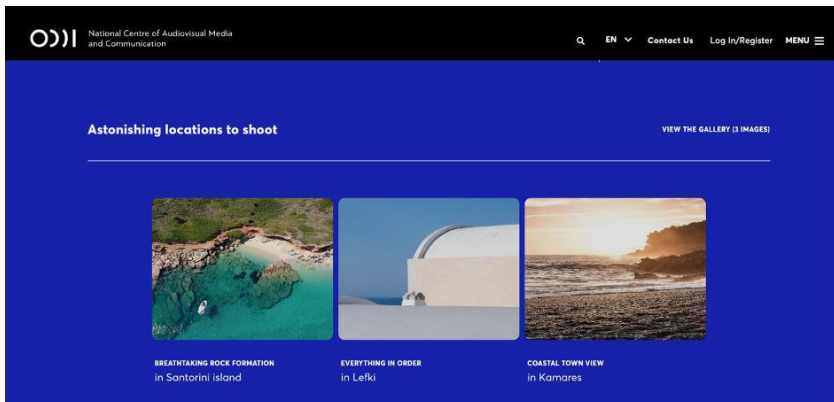


Fig. 4: Screenshot from EKOME homepage, with locations in focus, aiming to attract foreign productions.

Visibility, or the importance of 'television that travels'

The third analytical lens applied to the case in point concerns the notion of visibility – specifically, why and for whom international visibility and appeal matters. Visibility is discussed here both in practical terms, e.g. access to media content, and in epistemological terms, e.g. legitimization of objects of study, activating a reflective discussion regarding the significance of representability in global streaming catalogues for small television cultures, industries, and audiences, as well as for television studies in general.

Historically, the field of television studies has predominantly focused on English-language television fiction. This emphasis has led to the prioritisation of specific television cultures as more attractive objects of study, thereby overshadowing the unique developments and histories of television in other countries.[58] Over the years, various critical perspectives, concepts, and considerations of popularity and trends have influenced the scholarly agenda. One notable example is the concept of 'quality television', a crucial approach for certain programs to attain visibility and legitimacy in television criticism.[59] Television scholars who do not find themselves doing research and writing on extroverted Anglophone television cultures, which tend to produce recognisable, exportable, and popular cultural products, are rarely in the privileged position of analysing cases and material that international scholars would recognise and engage with. Concurrently, studies of extroverted television cultures are seldom burdened – or at least less so – by expectations and discussions surrounding legitimisation, i.e. the 'so-what' question. Additionally, introverted television cultures may also enjoy popularity, albeit among smaller audiences, but they remain largely unseen.

More recently, the examination of European television fiction has gained momentum following the success and hype of television productions and genres, such as Nordic noir. Characterised by commercial success that transcends narrow geographical boundaries, high production standards – reviving discussions about 'quality television' – and a strong appeal for international audiences,[60] European television fiction in languages other than English has been considered to be in a 'renaissance', going beyond the Nordic noir paradigm and delivering numerous, high-quality productions that speak to both national and transnational/global audiences.[61] Television that gets the opportunity to have a more international presence, visibility, and impact, despite originating in small television cultures, succeeds in securing benefits for the industry, translated into access to audiences, revenues, but also geocultural capital, in terms of increasing the perceived cultural value of the original territory.

The new condition of visibility provided by streaming platforms is proposed in this article as a development worth connecting back to earlier debates and interventions within television studies, specifically when it comes to attaching value to specific objects of study and 'the ways we define and justify the things that we do as researchers, as scholars, as teachers and as a community'.[62] By acknowledging Greece as an example of a fundamentally invisible television culture, we are presented with an opportunity to address both empirical and conceptual gaps, revolving around questions regarding the role of geographical parameters in defining what television and, by extension, what Netflix is.[63] As such, the (new) visibility regimes offered by streaming platforms such as Netflix can

hopefully inspire future studies that centralise the implications of the global character (and promise) of Netflix and promote the transnational agenda of television studies, as follows:

i) With global streamers, such as Netflix, facilitating the (symbolic and material) capital flows and the conditions for producing content that is attractive to a broader global media market, we need updated accounts regarding the impact of such developments on local production cultures and potential industry transformations. Future studies could therefore zoom in on how the production philosophy of small television cultures is challenged and reconfigured in response to these new possibilities.

ii) In terms of theory generation, scholarship has argued strongly for the need to go beyond the study of particular cases and to make use of grounded practices as the basis for developing broader theory.[64] Collaborative endeavors focusing on networking and knowledge exchange, such as the [Global Internet TV Consortium](#), can further intensify comparative approaches that address both the complexities of global dimensions and the specificities of national/regional contexts.

iii) Future studies should also maintain a sensitivity for persistent blind spots, as well as new invisibilities that might arise as a result of novel visibility regimes and hierarchies of value. Along these lines, a continuous evaluation of what is considered 'successful television' is deemed necessary, not least by activating audience perspectives.[65]

iv) Finally, and in relation to all of the above, new visibility regimes activate broader questions regarding how intersections between geography and technology inform world-ordering. As technological infrastructures – including activities related to funding, streaming, cataloguing, and recommending – challenge traditional knowledge and practices of production, distribution, and consumption of media content, constant monitoring of how established patterns are destabilised can provide useful knowledge regarding the 'sociopolitical implications of media flows'.[66]

Conclusion: A potential game-changer?

By being the first Greek drama show to launch into global subscription video-on-demand streaming platform Netflix, *Maestro in Blue* has contributed to Greece becoming a full Netflix nation – in the sense of participating in a multidirectional content flow, and not just being on the receiving end. Characterised by transnational markers relating to storytelling, aesthetic, and genre choices, *Maestro in Blue* seems broadly aligned with Netflix's commitment to representing social complexity, incorporating socially-marginalised perspectives, and challenging patriarchal values.[67] By looking closely at the conditions and circumstances that make it possible for Greek television series to travel at this moment in time, one could argue that the type of extroversion identified in the case of *Maestro in Blue* is not the result

of survival strategies in a state of emergency,[68] but rather the expression of a more organic process of synchronisation with global trends and tastes, which takes into consideration the expectations of both domestic and global audiences, as well as the result of fortuitous timing and synergies.

Netflix's glocalisation project can be defined as a general strategy of funding media content in order to satisfy the demands of locally-situated audiences, while at the same time building a library of local content it is willing and able to distribute on its platform in different international media markets. According to existing literature, local authenticity and high production values are important prerequisites for inclusion in the global catalogue. At the same time, although it is not accurate to speak of a clear-cut strategy,[69] the pattern that Netflix shows when it comes to smaller markets is that it prioritises licensed deals and co-production/co-financing, until it establishes itself in the market.[70] As such, the case investigated in this article provides an in-depth understanding of both ongoing and possible future developments within television industries and studies.

In line with Papakaliatis' previous work, *Maestro in Blue* pays tribute to the trope of forbidden or difficult romance and elevates visual pleasure to ultimate desideratum through a number of thoroughly curated audiovisual strategies. As is evident even in the [trailer](#) for the series, elements of this authorial signature are combined with local colours and 'weird' aesthetics, both resonating Greekness. What is more, the transnational is echoed, among other things, through a subtle catering to the tourist gaze; such packaging makes the show more easily legible by global audiences, potentially creating the circumstances for bigger global interest in (or, at least, curiosity about) what small television cultures such as Greece have to offer. While a deep dive into reception aspects has not been a primary goal of this article, it is worth considering that Greek critics have picked up on both strengths and weaknesses of this ambitious mixture. Some have praised the strategic extroversion of the series through the use of powerful visual tools,[71] others have argued that the authorial signature and the detailed curation of the visual is in fact an overpowering ingredient that does not allow audiences to emotionally connect to the story,[72] while there are also voices that have reacted negatively to the exoticisation and stereotyping of the Greek periphery.[73] A systematic examination of the reactions of critics and viewers alike during this important period for Greek television definitely has the potential to deliver interesting findings regarding the role of local audiences in (making sense of) transnational media flows.

Since 15 January 2024, two more Greek television mini-series have become available on Netflix: [Serres](#) (Σέρρες, ANT1+, 2022-2024) and [Save Me](#) (Σώσε με, ANT1+, 2022-2023). While this can be interpreted as an indication of Netflix's increased interest and presence in the Greek media market, an additional parameter that would definitely benefit from further

investigation is the impact of such developments on domestic audiences' sense of belonging. We know that local audiences feel included and valued when represented in global libraries[74] and it could be worth investigating how discourses of national success and pride tap into notions of collective cultural accomplishments and potential industrial game-changers.

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Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewers and the editorial board of NECSUS, as well as to her colleagues at the Department of Geography, Media and Communication, Karlstad University, for providing valuable comments. A big thank you goes out to Lydia Papadimitriou for reading earlier drafts of this article and generously sharing her thoughts. Special thanks are also due to the [Centre for Geomedia Studies](#) at Karlstad University for supporting this research.

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