

# FILM AND PLACE IN AN INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

INDIA-EUROPE FILM CONNECTIONS

Edited by

Krzysztof Stachowiak, Hania Janta,  
Jani Kozina and Therese Sunngren-Granlund



# Film and Place in an Intercultural Perspective

The book offers an interdisciplinary overview of the film and place relationship from an intercultural perspective. It explores the complex domain of place and space in cinema and the film industry's role in establishing cultural connections and economic cooperation between India and Europe.

With contributions from leading international scholars, various case studies scrutinise European and Indian contexts, exploring both the established and emerging locations. The book extends the dominantly Britain-oriented focus on India's cinema presence in Europe to European countries, such as Italy, Switzerland, Poland, Slovenia, Finland, and Sweden, where the Indian film industry progressively expands its presence. The chapters of this book look at Indian film production in Europe as a cultural bridge between India and Europe, fostering mutual understanding of the culture and society of the two regions.

This interdisciplinary book will be of interest to researchers in film studies, cultural anthropology, cultural geography, tourism, economics, sociology, and cultural studies. It will also be of interest to practitioners working in local authorities, destination management, tourism, and creative business, all of whom see the value of film production in attracting visitors, investment, and creating new networks with local economic actors. The book offers much-needed data and tools to translate their professional goals and potentials into effective regional strategies and activities.

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## 6 On the Italian trail of Indian films through the lens of media industry studies

*Marco Cucco and Massimo Scaglioni*

### Introduction

In 2013, the Italian press made great play of how various Indian audiovisual productions had elected to film in Italy. Many had shot in Milan and the surrounding region of Lombardy, prompting one of Italy's main weekly magazines, *L'Espresso*, to publish a piece titled "Bollywood: Miracolo a Milano" (*Bollywood: Miracle in Milan*), riffing on the title of one of Italy's most famous Neorealist films (*Miracolo a Milano/Miracle in Milan*). It stated that as many as 14 productions had chosen Lombardy in the space of 18 months, with an estimated total economic impact of €11m (Sasso 2013). Intrigued by what we read, we immediately decided to study the phenomenon of Indian productions filmed in Italy; the results were published in the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* (Cucco and Scaglioni 2014).

Nine years on, we are returning to the India–Italy relationship, in particular that between the Indian audiovisual industry and Italian locations. We asked ourselves whether Indian productions are still coming to film in Italy. If so, why Italy? Have the changes in recent years (the COVID-19 pandemic, the new Italian film policies, the on-demand services that are now producing and screening films) impacted on Italy as a filming location of choice? On one hand, this second study serves to confirm, disprove, or reshape the results of the first. On the other, it extends the study period (from 2010 to early 2022) and thus offers a more reliable panorama. In other words, this second study will help to understand whether the 2010–2013 Indian filming boom was merely a blip or the start of a trend.

To answer these questions, we have divided this chapter into four sections. The first summarises the results of our 2013 study, analysing why many Indian films and TV series were shot abroad and in particular why some Indian producers chose Italy. The second probes the more significant changes in the Italian and global audiovisual landscape between 2014 and early 2022 that may have influenced the relationship between Indian productions and Italian locations. We theoretically discuss the potential impact of VOD platforms, new national and local film policies introduced in Italy, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The same events will be investigated during an interview with a key-mediator in the Italy–India relationship (third section) in order confirm or refute our considerations. The third section also examines the list of films and television series shot in Italy between 2010 and 2022

with a view to identifying trends. And the fourth offers a critical appraisal of the Indian audiovisual productions' relationship with Italian locations.

This chapter uses a media industry studies approach (Herbet *et al.* 2020). Specifically, it brings together two study traditions linked to media industry studies: the political economy of media (Wasko 2015) and production studies (Caldwell 2008; Mayer *et al.* 2009; Szczepanik and Vonderau 2013). The former is a useful tool for relating companies' actions to the public policies regulating and/or supporting the media industry and for highlighting key trends in the market and corporate strategy. Production studies, meanwhile, are especially important for understanding the production cultures in which the companies operate and where the audiovisual products are created, to examine the operational dynamics of the production processes and how they affect the final output.

### **The outsourcing (in Italy and abroad) of Indian shoots: a recap**

Our earlier study on the delocalisation of Indian film shoots in Italy (Cucco and Scaglioni 2014) had three main stages: a) desk research on the Indian audiovisual industry and the delocalisation of filming based on political economy studies; b) in-depth interviews in Italy and India with audiovisual-industry professionals in order to understand dynamics and production cultures of both countries in relation to the outsourcing of Indian shoots in Italy; c) a survey of Italian film commissions aimed at collecting data and providing a quantitative support to our research. For the purposes of our study, we had identified three principal push factors underlying overseas delocalisation, in particular in Western countries, of shoots for Indian film and television series: a) logistical reasons, b) financial reasons, and c) the search for a wider audience, including the pursuit of specific key targets.

The logistical reasons concern how Indian crews find working conditions more congenial in the West: as many interviewees told us, the cities are less chaotic than in India, and the services available from the state and local businesses are more efficient, resulting in reduced costs and a higher-quality final output. The effectiveness of the host territories' services is down to the efforts of the film commissions and film offices now active throughout all Western countries as pull factors leveraged by the local-government bodies. Film commissions and film offices assist crews with location scouting, obtaining permits, recruiting local skilled workers, finding local services (hotels, catering, etc.), offering special discounts, etc. In 2013, no such services existed in India, and the necessary permits had to be applied for at various government departments (Ernst & Young and LA-India Film Council 2012). In logistical terms, India's monsoon season poses particular problems: the unpredictable weather can delay filming and thus increase costs. Another logistical benefit of delocalisation is that filming becomes simpler and less stressful, as the actors and crews are not besieged by fans and paparazzi in the West as they are in India.

The second type of push factor is the funding and economic incentives offered to audiovisual productions by many local- and national-government bodies. Subsidies and tax breaks seek to attract productions and thus stimulate the host locations'

economies (Goldsmith 2015; Cucco 2018a). Pertinently, India's public bodies have long failed to support the audiovisual industry, even subjecting it to very high taxation on the same footing as the gaming sector (Ganti 2017).

The third factor is the desire to make films with audience appeal and to reach specific targets. This goal works in three different directions. First, shooting abroad aims to make films more spectacular. To compete with the satellite pay channel offerings, film producers have begun to make fewer titles but with bigger budgets. With these extra resources, movies could be made that stood out from the routine television fare with lower production values, fulfilling their box office potential better and justifying the ticket price (Ganti 2007, 2012). In this context, foreign and exotic locations were a means to make films different, unusual, appealing, and thus more spectacular, even though the overseas locations were often mere backdrops. There was no cultural, linguistic, or political interaction with the host areas – except for the most famous cities and some of their celebrated landmarks, it was often hard to identify where the action was happening. As Rao recalls, “these spaces and geographies (and, implicitly, cultures) are Indianized by locating Mumbai film actors, actresses, and extras, speaking Hindi, in them” (2010, pp. 9–10).

Second, the use of material filmed abroad serves to attract a more affluent audience that can afford the more expensive tickets at the multi-screen cinemas that have recently appeared, an audience interested in seeing a different world from India, especially a Western one. Foreign films have a tiny market share in India, so Indian films shot abroad are among the few opportunities to see different milieux on screen. But the attempt to attract and satisfy a well-to-do audience is part of a broader process of gentrification that Indian cinema has followed in this millennium, aiming to position cinema as a cultural and economic activity acceptable to politicians and the influential strata of society (Ganti 2012).

And third, films shot overseas appeal to first- and second-generation Indian expats – non-resident Indians (NRIs) – who may like to watch films shot abroad with Indian actors or to engage with stories that may be similar to their own. Between the late 1990s and the start of the millennium, the perception of NRIs changed in India. Once seen as those who had abandoned the country for glamour and comfort abroad, they have now become an “icon of the desirable cosmopolitan Indian citizen straddling the globe” (Athique 2012, p. 282). Their representation on screen is thus of interest for Indian audiences too. In this context, it is useful to remember that ticket prices are higher in the West, so tickets sold abroad in dollars, euros, or pounds are worth more than those sold in India.

The Italian case study has confirmed two of these three reasons. Our survey and interviews have shown that Indian productions choose Italy for logistical reasons and for the spectacular settings. Logistically, there are film commissions all over Italy, while the mild and sunny climate makes it possible to shoot for many hours a day and many months a year, especially during the Indian monsoons. In terms of the spectacular, Italy offers a great variety of landscapes – sea, mountains, rolling hills, plus cities historic and modern, large, and small, and Indian productions have used them all, sometimes combining very diverse settings even in the same picture. In this framework, funding reasons are not relevant. National public financing in

Italy is accessible only for Italian films and international co-productions with Italy. Foreign films can apply for local public financing, but local grants are too scant for motivating far-away crews to move to Italy.

Do all these motivations still apply nine years later? What intervening changes in India and Italy might have influenced filming delocalisation processes?

### **Outsourcing: a different framework**

Looking at the period from 2013 to today, there are some factors that could theoretically have influenced the relationship between Indian audiovisual productions and Italian locations.

The first is the advent of the on-demand platforms. The streaming service companies differ considerably from one another, operating to different business models and in different-sized markets. Some provide content in one country only; others work internationally or even globally. The best-known and most widespread platforms in the world are currently Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Both operate in 200+ countries (in India since 2016), offering self-produced/-funded content or material bought in from other producers. In April 2020, also Disney+ entered the Indian digital market with the VOD platform Disney+ Hotstar. To what extent can the establishment of global on-demand services impact on the foreign delocalisation of Indian audiovisual productions?

The big platforms use their own original productions for different purposes (Lobato 2019). On the one hand, they are interested in content that plays well in their various markets, with a view to extracting the maximum possible return on their economic investments in production. This can lead them to produce films and television series with transnational appeal, aided by outsourcing. Some studies have indeed shown that having locations from different countries in the same film or series can increase its appeal to global audiences, which is why many sequels feature more locations than the preceding product did (Cucco 2015). On the other hand, the platforms use their original productions to obtain a foothold in the countries they wish to penetrate. Here, productions are conceived mainly for a national market – to boost subscriptions in that country, to collaborate with local companies and to avoid offering content that is foreign to the national audience. This is especially important for a country like India, where although there are no political and commercial barriers to entry for foreign films, audiences strongly prefer local content. Box office performance makes this clear: in pre-pandemic 2019, Indian films had an 87% market share in India; foreign ones, just 13% (European Audiovisual Observatory 2020, p. 54). In other words, the platforms' effect on outsourcing could be twofold, working paradoxically in opposite directions.

As regards what has changed in Italy, the last ten years have seen a constant growth in the film commissions' offerings.<sup>1</sup> Through the experience gained on the ground and the results achieved, film commissions can now provide increasingly competitive and effective services. Also, nearly all Italian film commissions offer one or more local funds for the various stages of production (development, preproduction, and shooting), some of which are open even to foreign productions made

in Italy. These local funds have a primarily economic aim: to attract inward investment (Cucco 2018a). So public funding provided to foreign companies also helps to achieve the set objectives and thus to attain a collective benefit.

While the individual Italian regions are increasingly active in attracting film and other audiovisual shoots, the Italian government has bolstered the audiovisual and cinema tax incentive schemes and put more money behind them. Tax credits have proved useful in encouraging private investment and, more generally, a greater alignment between Italian audiovisual productions and the market. It is important to note here how the tax incentive programme has continually grown. It is dedicated to foreign films, shorts, TV series, documentaries, entertainment shows, and web products shot at least partly in Italy and with an Italian executive producer. The tax credits now on offer represent 40% of the Italian executive producer's costs, up to a total annual funded value of €50m. Through this measure aimed at foreign productions, Italian locations are no longer just an exotic dimension that adds to a film's appeal: they have become a strategic tool for accessing generous tax incentives by bringing an Italian company on board. This measure is effective at attracting investment into Italy, but with a side-effect that the government did not envisage: it is now in foreign companies' interest to have an Italian executive producer rather than an Italian co-producer (Cucco 2018b).

Another major factor that may have been pivotal in the relationship between Indian production companies and Italian locations is of course the COVID-19 emergency. The pandemic halted film and audiovisual production for months all over the world. And when production managed to restart, delocalisations seemed particularly at risk, for positive COVID cases could suddenly shut down filming – with all the costs to the producer of being forced to stay idly overseas. Moreover, with Indian productions, the vaccines' arrival did not necessarily help: those who received Covishield (widespread in India) had to wait for the vaccine to be recognised by Europe's individual national agencies before being able to travel freely as in pre-pandemic days.

### **Indian shoots in Italy (2010–2022) and Occhi di Ulisse**

To map the Indian films and series shot in Italy, we consulted the Italian film commission websites, which almost invariably have a record of the productions hosted in their area.<sup>2</sup> The Indian titles we found always involved the Italian production services company Occhi di Ulisse, set up in 2009 by Ivano Fucci and Michele Saragoni. Our 2013 survey of the Italian film commissions had already identified this company's central role as a key intermediary between India and Italy, which is why in 2013 we had interviewed Ivano Fucci, line and executive producer for Occhi di Ulisse. The confirmation of the company's continued importance prompted us to seek a second in-depth interview with Fucci to examine in detail the Indian productions with which Occhi di Ulisse has worked.<sup>3</sup>

Occhi di Ulisse acts as an intermediary between Italy and foreign productions – often from India but also other countries from France, Hungary, and Switzerland to the Czech Republic in recent years. From the year it was founded to early 2022, Occhi di Ulisse was involved in the making of 47 Indian audiovisual works in Italy (Table 6.1).



Table 6.1 Indian audiovisual productions filmed in Italy (2010–2022).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Film title</i>	<i>Production company</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>Italian region(s) + foreign countries</i>
2011	Badrinath	Geetha Arts	Hyderabad	Veneto
2011	Paglu	Surinder Films	Kolkata	Lombardy, Tuscany
2011	Rajapattai	PVP Production	Tamil Nadu	Lombardy, Tuscany
2012	Devudu Chesina Manushulu	Sri Venkateswara Cine Chitra	Hyderabad	Aosta Valley
2012	Paglu 2	Surinder Films	Kolkata	Aosta Valley, Lombardy, Piedmont
2012	Ajab Gazab Love	Vashu Bhagnani's Production	Mumbai	Aosta Valley, Lombardy, Tuscany
2012	Baadshah	Parameswara Art Productions	Hyderabad	Lombardy, Piedmont
2012	Sarocharu	Vyjayanthi Production	Hyderabad	Lombardy, Tuscany
2012	Mirchi	UV Creations	Hyderabad	Lombardy, Tuscany
2012	Rocky	Shree Venkatesh Films	Kolkata	Sicily
2013	Attarintiki Daredi	Sri Venkateswara Cine Chitra	Hyderabad	Aosta Valley, Lombardy
2013	Rangbaaz	Surinder Films	India	Lazio, Lombardy
2013	Majnu	Surinder Films	Kolkata	Lombardy
2013	Matt & Juliet	Shree Venkatesh Films	Kolkata	Aosta Valley, Lombardy, Veneto
2013	Bramhan	K Manju Cinemaas	Chennai	Aosta Valley, Lombardy
2013	Irumbu Kuthirai	AGS Entertainment	Chennai	Tuscany, Veneto
2014	Bangali Babu English Mem	SVF Entertainment	Kolkata	Veneto
2014	Bramman	Anto Joseph Film Company, K Manju Cinemaas	Kerala	Lombardy
2014	Race Gurram	Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Productions	Hyderabad	Lombardy
2014	Alludu Seenu	Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Productions	Hyderabad	Veneto
2014	Irumbu Kuthirai	AGS Entertainment	Chennai	Liguria, Lombardy, Tuscany
2015	Herogiri	Surinder Film	Kolkata	Campania + Switzerland
2015	Besh Korechi Prem Korechi	SVF Entertainment, Surinder Films	Kolkata	Aosta Valley, Lombardy
2015	Vedalam	Shri Saai Ram Creations	Chennai	Aosta Valley, Tuscany
2016	One Way Ticket	Mekbrand	Mumbai	Liguria + France, Spain
2016	Abhimaan	Grassroot Entertainment	Kolkata	Lombardy + Switzerland
2016	Haripada Bandwala	SVF Entertainment	Kolkata	Lombardy
2017	Katamarayudu	Northstar Entertainment	Hyderabad	Lombardy
2017	Mister	Light House Movie Makers, Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Productions	Hyderabad	Lombardy

2017	Radha	Sri Venkateswara Cine Chitra	Hyderabad	Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige
2017	Ami Je Ke Tomar	SVF Entertainment	Kolkata	Lombardy
2017	Fu: Friendship Unlimited	Mahesh Manjrekar Movies	Mumbai	Lombardy
2017	Andhhagadu	A.K. Entertainments	Hyderabad	Campania
2017	Rangbaaz	Rup Rong Films, SVF Entertainment	Kolkata	Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige
2017	Vunnadhi Okate Zindagi	Sravanthi Cinematics	Hyderabad	Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige
2017	Jawaan	Arunachal Creations	Kolkata	Aosta Valley, Lombardy
2018	Inspector Notty K	Surinder Films, Jeetz Filmworks	Kolkata	Liguria
2018	Krishnarjuna Yudham	Shine Screens	Hyderabad	Campania, Liguria + Czech Republic
2018	Aravindha Sametha Veera Raghava	Haarika & Hassine Creations	Hyderabad	Lombardy + Switzerland
2019	Saaho	UV Creations, T-Series Films	Hyderabad	Lazio + Croatia
2019	Chanakya	AK Entertainment	Hyderabad	Aosta Valley, Lombardy
2019	Roam Rome Mein	Rising Star Entertainment, Eros Worldwide	Mumbai	Lazio
2020	Bheeshma	Sithara Entertainments	Hyderabad	Apulia, Campania
2021	Red	Sri Sravanthi Movies		Trentino-Alto Adige, Tuscany
2021	Bony	Surinder Films	Kolkata	Lombardy, Tuscany
2022	Radhe Shyam	Gopikrishna Movies, T-Series Films, UV Creations	Hyderabad	Aosta Valley, Lazio, Liguria, Piedmont, Tuscany
2022	Thank You	Sri Venkateswara Creations	Hyderabad	Piedmont

*Source:* Own elaboration, based on data from Occhi di Ulisse and the Internet Movie Database.

There is no register of foreign films shot in Italy, so we cannot be sure how many or which Indian productions chose to delocalise filming in Italy. Our research, however, has not found any titles beyond those in this table. The relationship between Indian productions and Italian locations, therefore, is mediated essentially by just one company: Occhi di Ulisse. No competition seems to exist in this specific business, despite there are not entering barriers for national or foreign companies.

Table 6.1 facilitates various immediate deductions. First, the number of productions hosted in Italy has tended to increase – tripling from three in 2011 to nine in 2017. The phenomenon detected in our initial study (2010–2013) was not therefore a one-off but the start of a trend that has strengthened. Second, the works hosted in Italy are both films and TV series. Thus the delocalisation strategy serves the aims of the film and television industries alike. Third, these 47 works are by companies based in different cities and are thus an expression of different regional cinemas. This means that delocalisation in Italy transcends the differences between the industries in the various regions, linking Bollywood (whose output is also intended for export), for example, to the country's other producers. Fourth, the Indian productions have used various Italian regions from the north, centre, and south; in particular, some movies have been filmed simultaneously in several regions with different traits. Often, for example, individual films and TV series shot in Italy combine big cities with small villages and urban settings with natural landscapes (mountains, lakes, and the sea). This shows how Indian productions exploit Italy's scenic variety to lend their works a particular visual richness, making them spectacular and thus attractive.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 6.1 is based on the data collected in the previous table, and it provides a map of the Italian regions touched by Indian shoots. Despite the variety of regions involved, a predilection for the north of the country looks quite evident: Lombardy hosted 29 audiovisual works, while Aosta Valley 11. Lombardy counts on several strengths: small-, medium-, and big-sized cities, modern buildings and infrastructures, industrial areas, and a rich environmental heritage (mountain, lakes, rivers, etc.). However, in 27 cases out of 29, the audiovisual works involving Lombardy have been shoot entirely or partially in Milan, the economic heart, the fashion capital, and the most international city of Italy. The appealing of the main Italian metropolis is in some way balanced by Aosta Valley, which holds the second position of the ranking. In this case, Alps probably play a key role in attracting Indian companies, as it happened in the case of Switzerland (Schneider 2011). Moreover, the combined use of these two regions within the same audiovisual work (seven cases) allows the access to a wide spectrum of different locations and guarantees a spectacular backdrop for Indian films and TV series.

Tuscany, located in the centre of Italy, hosted 11 Indian audiovisual works too. In this case, two hypotheses stand out the other ones. The first is related to the region's beauties and its international fame. The second one concerns Ivano Fucci, line and executive producer at Occhi di Ulisse, that we already mentioned earlier. Tuscany is his home region, and the Table 6.1 reveals that Tuscany has been selected at the beginning of the decade more than at its end.



Figure 6.1 Map of Italian regions involved in Indian audiovisual works (2010–2022).

Source: Own elaboration

It means that probably when *Occhi di Ulisse* entered the business of film locations, Ivano Fucci started to work by looking around himself, by exploiting his own personal network of contacts, and suggesting his most familiar places to Indian companies.

The in-depth interview with Ivano Fucci enabled us to probe these initial considerations further and to deepen our understanding of the Italy – India relationship. The interview confirmed that Italy appeals to Indian producers for two main reasons: locations and tax breaks. Italy has a richly varied array of locations. Not all Italian regions are equally enticing to Indian producers: although very attractive to foreign producers for their scenic beauty, Puglia and Sardinia, for example, are not very sought-after, as parts of India are similar. This shows that Indian producers

choose Italian locations to make their films more spectacular and unique and thus more attractive to audiences.

Nevertheless, Ivano Fucci maintains that access to tax incentives currently matters more to Indian producers than the locations. That does not mean that production cost savings are more important to them than content appeal. Essentially, spectacular and exotic locations can be found in various countries, but some are more generous with incentives than others. This understandable logic now works in Italy's favour, although it does entail the risk that Indian productions may go elsewhere if other countries offer equally or more competitive tax breaks.<sup>5</sup> According to Fucci, Italy's main competitors are now France, Hungary, and the UK<sup>6</sup>; the latter has an advantage over them all, as the English language facilitates communication, agreement, and cooperation between Italian crews and local stakeholders. So there is no guarantee that Indian productions will still be using Italian locations in the long term, although presumably they will continue to while the Italian government offers incentives that the producers find worthwhile.

Tax incentives are not the only economic carrot that Italy can offer. As we have noted, nearly every Italian region now has at least one audiovisual-production fund provided by its film commission, some available to overseas projects too. Yet as Ivano Fucci observes, these contributions are meagre at most (maximum €250,000/project) and are not enough to attract Indian productions on their own. On this regard, the data that we collected (Figure 6.1) confirm Fucci's words: Lombardy is the main Italian destination for Indian films, but Lombardy does not have a film fund. It means that local public financing is not a key pull factor for attracting Indian crews in Italy. In addition, an Indian producer looking to access these funds must monitor the regions' invitations to tender, apply with all the necessary paperwork, and wait for the adjudication to be made. This all takes time, planning and a familiarity with how Italian public bodies operate, so it tends to put Indian and foreign producers off. It seems much more straightforward for them, however, to bring in an Italian executive producer, thus rendering the project eligible for the tax incentives while the Italian partner handles all the admin.

In this scenario of business strategy and public policy, Ivano Fucci's insights also remind us how production processes are often influenced by chance and by unpredictable circumstances that demand instant solutions and timely decisions. As with *Made in Heaven*, a series exclusive to Amazon Prime Video centring on two wedding planners, for which Occhi di Ulisse was line producer. The series was to be shot in Italy, but the Italian authorities' delay in recognising Covishield prompted the production company to switch filming to France.<sup>7</sup>

The eventual recognition of the Indian vaccine made it possible to shoot *Radhe Shyam* in Italy; it was one of the most expensive films in Indian cinema history, with an estimated budget of \$30m. It was set in 1970s Italy across five regions: Lazio, Piedmont, Tuscany, Liguria, and Valle d'Aosta. In this case, the Italian settings were not merely window dressing but were justified by the storyline. The film was shot in two languages (Hindi and Telugu) and will be dubbed into five, with distribution on Netflix too.

### New horizons: platforms and tourism

The *Radhe Shyam* case offers a springboard for some important observations. First, the film was the umpteenth confirmation of how supplying hospitality services to film and audiovisual productions could prove lucrative for the Italian regions. *Radhe Shyam*'s arrival entailed foreign capital being spent in Italy, a boost to local employment, increased local tax receipts, etc. Had the Indian producer gone elsewhere, these benefits would have been lost to other countries. In this context, the relationship with India is especially crucial given that India is the world's main film producing country with ever-growing numbers of titles: from 1,845 in 2015 to 2,446 in 2019, an annual rise of 7.3% (European Audiovisual Observatory 2020, p. 13). Singularly too, production remained high during the pandemic, with 1,238 films made in 2020 and 1,818 in 2021 (European Audiovisual Observatory 2022, p. 15). Also, the corporatisation of Indian cinema has boosted the solidity and stability of the Indian firms operating in this arena (Ganti 2012, 2017), a source of confidence for Italian stakeholders.

The second consideration is that having the film in the Netflix catalogue affords the Italian locations great visibility among Indian and international audiences. And this can lead to increased interest in Italy as a travel destination. Unfortunately, film tourism is still a very difficult field for quantitative study since a reliable methodology still has to be achieved (Cucco and Richeri 2021). Some researchers have shown a bent for film tourism on Indian viewers' part (Josiam *et al.* 2020), although we do not yet know whether Indian films and TV series shot in Italy over the last ten years have had an impact on tourism. Also, although some countries – for example, Switzerland (Frank 2016) and Spain<sup>8</sup> – have offered tourism experiences linked to Indian films shot there, this has not happened in Italy, thus limiting the scope for monitoring and studying the Indian film tourism phenomenon. Given these necessary contextual considerations, the advent of the platforms and the boost that they have given to the international circulation of audiovisual content can be said to have favoured tourism. For the more people see the content, the greater the chance that some of them will become film tourists.

For those locations that aim at increasing their touristic flows, it is important to remind that film tourism could need to be encouraged and incentivised, since in some cases it does not emerge spontaneously. In the case of Indian audiovisual works, it is vital that viewers know in which Italian cities and regions the films and TV series that they have seen were shot in; often, though, these locations remain anonymous. Their role is merely decorative, evocative, and spectacular. As we noted in our earlier study, in many cases Italy's presence in Indian films is often down to three types of dance and song sequences (Cucco and Scaglioni 2014, pp. 427–428). The first is the romantic song – choreographed scenes centring on the male and female leads and their love story. Romantic songs normally require stunning landscape backdrops, either the natural beauty of hill and mountain, lake and sea, or the historic beauty of piazzas and city streets. The second type are the transition songs, which punctuate or link up the film's narrative dynamic, resolving a series of negative events that have built up to that point. Small villages are

suitable locations for these songs, where the characters might take a walk together. A third type are the party songs, scenes with crowded gatherings where the actors are normally introduced at the start of the film. Clearly, in most Indian films shot in Italy, the need for settings for musical scenes is bound up with the dreamy atmosphere of these moments and is not prompted or justified by specific references in the storyline to actual places. The location remains an evocative backdrop that chimes with the characters' emotions rather than linking to points in the plot. Of course, Indian producers and directors have no particular interest in making the Italian locations recognisable, so it is hard to imagine how this problem could be overcome.

Action would also be required to attract Indian filmgoers to Italy, which begs the question: who is responsible for promoting it? Presumably the Italian regions hosting the filming, but local government often lacks the necessary skills and resources. Film tourism is still also unpredictable and hard to manage, thus disincentivising ad hoc initiatives. In other words, Indian film shoots in Italy are currently a resource that is only partially exploited, offering as yet unexplored avenues (e.g. tourism).

Finally, it should be noted that the advent of the platforms serves not only to promote tourism to the Italian locations by Indian visitors but also to potentially promote Indian films to Italian audiences. Here too, locations have a key role to play. In Italy, for example, very few Indian films make it into theatres: 0 in 2015 and 2016, 2 in 2017 and 2018, 12 in 2019, and 0 again in 2020 (source: [www.cinetel.it](http://www.cinetel.it)). And the few Indian films that do come to Italy are distributed only in the big cities, so they do not reach a mass audience. Compared with this paucity, Italian subscribers of Netflix and Amazon Prime Video now have dozens of Indian films to watch. In this context of an unprecedented availability of Indian films in Italy, the use of Italian locations may prove pivotal. Italian locations might theoretically represent a bridge, drawing Italian audiences into a cinema that they are unaccustomed to encounter.

### **Some concluding considerations**

As the analysis shows, Indian audiovisual productions' choice of Italian locations is not an exceptional phenomenon but rather a trend that has remained stable throughout the last decade. The delocalisation of Indian film shoots in Western countries has three types of driver: logistical, financial, and appealing. These categories can be further broken down. For delocalisation in Italy, our analysis has confirmed these three types, albeit in just some of their forms. As Figure 6.2 shows, delocalisations are down to good local services, the weather, tax incentives, and a desire for the spectacular. Our study has not, however, looked at Indian audiences, so we hope that future studies may fill this gap and show whether Italian locations really can appeal to affluent Indian audiences or NRIs.

The comparison with our 2013 study shows how tax incentives have grown in importance – understandably since film production in India has long received no public support, and even after the corporatisation of cinema in Italy, public funding remains marginal (Ganti 2017). Italy now offers various incentive schemes,

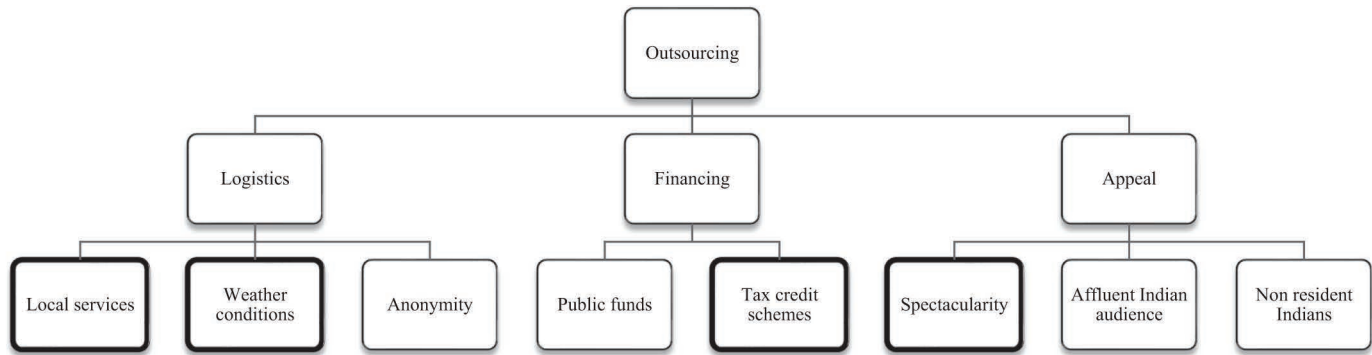


Figure 6.2 The reasons for outsourcing Indian film shoots (black outlines indicate the drivers found for Italy).

Source: Own elaboration



which have become particularly generous during the pandemic, as the Italian government has deemed them the most suitable tool to help relaunch the sector. The importance of tax incentives in attracting film shoots nevertheless exposes Italy to considerable uncertainty: if other European countries offer bigger incentives, Italy risks losing out. Italy does not have a monopoly on sunshine and varied, attractive landscapes, so that might not be enough to maintain its current flow of hosted productions.

In this context, it remains uncertain how the on-demand services will affect delocalisation. The platforms use their own original productions for different purposes; delocalisation sometimes serves their aims and sometimes does not at all. The Italy analysis uncovered only two cases where the platforms were involved: *Radhe Shyam* and *Made in Heaven* (actually shot in France because of problems with the Indian vaccine). On this front, therefore, the Italian case study cannot yet identify any specific trends.

It has, however, proved extremely useful in reflecting on the relationship between audiovisual productions and local areas and its specific nature in the case of Indian productions. This relationship has been mediated in Europe for nearly 20 years by public intermediaries – the film commissions, which provide primarily logistical support and mediate on three levels. First, they act as intermediaries between the audiovisual production (production companies, directors, and screenwriters) and the host area (local institutions and the community). These stakeholders have different goals; they are not in with the industry lingo; and their work is subject to timescales that are hard to reconcile. Second, film commissions encourage collaboration between different production cultures – professionals that the audiovisual productions bring to a given place for the filming and professionals recruited in situ from local and non-local people. In other words, film commissions help to create bespoke teams whose members have different habits and ways of working. Third, film commissions incentivise a brand-new collaboration between the audiovisual production and the tourist sector. These two worlds have traditionally always been separated, unaware of each other's dynamics yet capable of achieving significant economic results when they work together (Cucco and Richeri 2021).

The study of Indian films shot in Italy shows how this economic and cultural intermediation can also be performed by a private company, in our case Occhi di Ulisse. This inevitably raises the question of why the Indian companies, which could deal with the Italian film commissions directly, have chosen to go through a private firm. We can offer some explanations. The spirit of initiative and professionalism of Occhi di Ulisse founder Ivano Fucci has certainly played a part. Perhaps Italy's film commissions are not very proactive with far-off film industries whose products are not popular in Italy and Europe. Or perhaps (and this is our preferred hypothesis) the Indian film industries still strongly favour informal relationships based on trust. Ivano Fucci knows Indian culture well; he spends much of the year in India and has built his reputation in the field. This may offer greater traction with the Indian producers than an Italian public body like a film commission. And regardless of this specific case, this dynamic reminds us once again how each film industry has its own peculiarities, its own *modus operandi* and its own

preferences. Each industry is part of a specific production culture and needs suitable intermediaries in order to collaborate with external entities.

One final note: as we have just observed, when film crews go abroad, this is always an encounter between two cultures. The public debate in Europe is firmly centred on sustainability, which also impinges on audiovisual productions, especially during shooting. Green protocols are becoming increasingly adopted across the industry in a practice that is strongly recommended by the institutions and is also a subject of study and training (Pabiś-Orzeszyna and Keilbach 2021). Italy is no exception. So green policies and how they can affect the ability to attract (or deter) shoots from other production cultures will undoubtedly be a future theme informing the relationship between Indian film shoots and Italian locations.

## Notes

- 1 For a map of local film funds and services for national and foreign companies shooting audiovisual works in Italy, please consult the website Italy For Movies, available from: [www.italyformovies.it/](http://www.italyformovies.it/).
- 2 We consulted the websites of the 19 film commissions affiliated to the association Italian Film Commissions. The links to the film commissions' websites are available in the "Members" section of the association's website, available from: [www.italianfilmcommissions.it/](http://www.italianfilmcommissions.it/).
- 3 Interview with Ivano Fucci made by the authors on 15.01.2022, via Microsoft Teams.
- 4 Some of the listed works were also filmed in other European countries, primarily Switzerland but also Croatia, France, Spain and the Czech Republic.
- 5 For a comparative analysis of tax incentive schemes in Europe, please consult the European Audiovisual Observatory report (Milla *et al.* 2016). There are no more recent reports providing a comparative approach.
- 6 Competition between countries to attract audiovisual shoots is no longer a novelty but a reality documented for several years now (see for example Miller *et al.* 2005; Wasko and Erickson 2008; Cucco 2015; Goldsmith 2015). Every production has its own specific needs, however, so the countries competing for them vary from case to case.
- 7 While France recognised Covishield vaccine in July 2021, Italian Ministry of Health did it at the end of September 2021. See the communication of the Embassy of Italy in New Delhi, available from: [https://ambnewdelhi.esteri.it/ambasciata\\_newdelhi/en/ambasciata/news/bacheca-consolare/2021/09/riconoscimento-dell-equivalenza.html](https://ambnewdelhi.esteri.it/ambasciata_newdelhi/en/ambasciata/news/bacheca-consolare/2021/09/riconoscimento-dell-equivalenza.html).
- 8 In 2013, Lonely Planet launched a guide to Spain aimed specifically at the Indian market, and travel agencies advertise tours to the locations featured in *Zindagi Milegi Na Debora* (2011), a road trip entirely shot in Spain. In return for the support received by locals during the shooting stage, the producer agreed to include a short advertisement promoting Spain before the start of the film. After the film release 60,444 Indians visited Spain, nearly double the 2011 figure. Source available from: [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/19/spain-courts-bollywood-productions-to-attract-more-indian-tourists](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/19/spain-courts-bollywood-productions-to-attract-more-indian-tourists).

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