

# The origins of public relations in Greece: Tracing the missing link and excavating landmark cases

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an historical narrative tracing precedents of Greek Public Relations (PR) practice as far back as the organizing of mega events in mid-nineteenth century culminating in the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. The analysis documents that PR activities are interwoven with Greek governments' initiatives aimed at tourism promotion. The paper is based on archival material and secondary sources. Access was granted to the special collections of the National Library of Greece and the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive of the National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation. Moreover, the study interrogates the three landmark events that ushered in the emergence of professional public relations in Greece in the early postwar period and supplements with important information the conventional accounts. The analysis established a PR-Tourism and National image promotion nexus that runs continuously throughout the period under examination, from the emergence of PR activities in mid-nineteenth century up until the early 1950s. The findings are based on the available written records. This historical review does not purport to be exhaustive and comprehensive. Future research could identify more PR-like activities worthy of mention. The study provides a springboard for investigating the precedents of PR practice in the pre-professionalization era. This investigation calls for an interdisciplinary perspective. This paper is the first one to trace precedents of professional PR practice to the second half the nineteenth century and the interwar period in Greece. It shows the interconnection of PR-like activities with tourism and underscores the prominent position of state agencies in those activities.

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## Keywords

History, precedents, PR-like activities, public relations, Greece, proto-pr, tourism, olympic games

## Introduction

It is widely accepted among academics (Theofilou, 2015; Theofilou and Watson, 2014; Yannas, 2004) and practitioners (Koutoupis, 1992; Magnissalis, 2002) that public relations emerged in Greece in early 1950s. All accounts mention three landmark events: (a) the first campaign of the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) assigned to the American advertising agency of Foote, Cote & Belding in 1951 and implemented in 1952; (b) the event celebrations surrounding the 1900th anniversary of the coming of Apostle Paul to Greece in 1951; and (c) the initiation of public relations programs in 1952 by prominent Greek firms including the ISOLA Group, a manufacturer of electrical appliances.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: First, to pose some questions interrogating the basis for designating these events as constitutive of public relations in Greece as well as supplement the record with undisclosed information derived from archival material and secondary sources; Second, to treat these cases as a launching pad to trace precedents of what came to be known as the beginning of Greek public relations (PR) practice going as far back as the organizing mega events beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century including the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. Throughout the historical narrative, we intend to demonstrate that in the era of pre-professional PR practice that spanned the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, PR-like activities or as Watson (2013) calls them “proto-PR” activities were mostly state-led concentrating on tourism and the promotion of Greece abroad. By tracing precedents of PR practice in the historical record (Russell and Lamme, 2016) as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, we intend to dispel the view that the history of public relations in Greece is intimately linked to the labor of a few practitioners in the early 1950s who had been influenced by their American counterparts. By going all the way back to the formative years of the modern Greek nation-state and building upon the public relations history perspective of Lamme and Russell (2010), we intend to demonstrate that the public relations function in Greece up until the end of World War II was performed by individuals who employed their persuasive skills in the areas of government, sports and business and whose prime motivation was advocacy for the nation. Without underestimating the American influence in shaping postwar PR practice in Greece, we heeded the call of PR scholar L’Etang (2008: 329): “to research PR activities in cultures other than the USA in culturally specific and grounded ways”. Our study follows in the footsteps of other academics who have questioned relying upon the dominant ‘four models’ template of US PR history in writing PR histories of other countries (Fitch and L’Etang, 2017). Offering alternative accounts, scholars have traced precedents of PR in single country studies of the United Kingdom (L’Etang, 1998, 2008); Spain (Salcedo, 2008), Portugal (Santos, 2016), Israel (Roth-Cohen and Magen, 2017), Norway (Dahlen, 2019), Turkey

(Karaaslan Şanlı, 2018; Özdemir, 2016), Japan (Yamamura et al., 2013), Siam (Tantivejakul, 2020) and Thailand (Tantivejakul, 2019). In the case of the United States (US), the societally informed historical accounts of Miller (2010) as well as of Lamme and Russell (2010) have tried to counterbalance the over-reliance on corporate/big business perspective in American PR histories. In the same vein, our study extends the investigation of the public relations function both in time - going back to the 1850s- and in sectors – politics, sports and tourism-not solely concerned with business.

Our study supplements the burgeoning literature of offering a national perspective of the PR concept and practice, or as otherwise stated, of PR functions and PR as a profession (Russell and Lamme, 2016). Methodologically, our study of PR in Greece tries to highlight the cultural and social context that surrounds the circulation of concepts like propaganda and publicity from the mid-nineteenth century up to World War II period and public relations in the postwar period as well as document a number of ‘proto-PR’ actions (Watson, 2013, 2015) or PR-like initiatives in modern Greek history leading up to the end of World War II. Prior to 1950, the terms press office, publicity, advertising and propaganda label similar initiatives, what we call PR-like activities primarily aimed at image promotion and advocacy. Our analysis draws upon archival material, press reports, secondary sources on specific historical periods and of course the writings of practitioners. We have not encountered the term “public relations” in the material before the early 1950s but we have found ample references to the term “propaganda”. For this reason, we identify “PR-like” or “proto-PR” actions in the pre-professional era of Greek PR and concur with Kunczik’s (1997:12) assertion that distinguishing “among advertising, PR and propaganda in foreign image cultivation is merely a semantic game.” For the onset of the professional era in the postwar period, we have analyzed and interpreted the texts and actions of the practitioners from the vantage point of the prevalent American influence in Greece in the late 1940s and early 1950s. If we were to use Bentele’s (2015) categorization, this study would be considered descriptive in nature and would fall within the national PR histories genre, adopting the fact or event-based approach of PR historiography.

The article is structured as follows: First, we pose some questions and try to fill some lacunae in the treatment of the three cases that ushered the professional era in Greek PR. Two out of the three cases dealt with tourism providing us with a springboard to explore further the nexus between Greek PR and tourism. Next, we demonstrate how “PR-like”, or “proto-PR” activities are implicated in tourism and national image promotion through the country’s organization and/or participation in mega events such as the Zappeian Olympiads, the Athens Olympics of 1896 as well as national and international exhibitions of commercial products and artifacts. Throughout the article, we trace the nexus of PR with tourism and national image promotion all the way back to the 1850s and demonstrate its evolution successively into the interwar period and into the early 1950s. In all historical periods we surveyed, the state, either directly or in a few cases indirectly, played a crucial role as the initiator and organizer of “PR-like” or “proto-PR” activities. The last period under investigation – the early 1950s-marks the professionalization and Americanization of Greek PR practice. What differentiates this period from previous ones is the emergence of a new occupational group who utilized their persuasive skills but unlike their

like-minded predecessors proclaimed to be PR practitioners. In their hands, “PR-like” or “proto-PR” activities turned out to be plain PR. In the concluding section, we round up our claims connecting Greek PR to tourism and national image promotion and pointing out that this missing link in writing the history of public relations in Greece has eluded thus far both scholars and practitioners alike.

### **Interrogating three PR cases in the 1950s and the nexus of PR with tourism**

The treatment of the aforementioned cases of the early 1950s in the literature is very sketchy. We are provided with a short factual account in the case of the tourism promotion campaign and brief notes in passing for the other two cases.

Certainly, much more needs to be said to qualify as an adequate historical treatment of the origins of PR in Greece. An inquisitive scholar would not only want to know more things but would also like to pose a number of questions. For example, why should we accept at face value the designation of these events by practitioners as landmarks without interrogating the basis upon which these nominations were made. The fact that the first practitioners defined their practice in a certain manner unmasks the private pro-business orientation of public relations. To the mind of the initial practitioners, public relations is a private activity promoting the interests of the business entity which employs their services. According to this conception, the public sector is excluded from being a supplier of PR services and is considered to be a recipient of services provided, through contracts, by PR professionals and/or agencies.

Without underestimating the pivotal role of a number of professionals, we believe that the history of PR in Greece is much broader and richer than the one documenting the activities of early PR practitioners. Two of the landmark cases that we have mentioned provided us with a clue of where and how far back in time to look for PR professional practice. Tourism –not just as separate sector but broadly conceived as a set of economic and cultural activities interconnected to trade, transport, industry, communications, and leisure among others – is the glue offering fertile ground for PR activities. Tourism binds together the tourism advertising campaign and the religious festivities on the occasion of St Paul’s coming to Greece 1900 years ago.

Upon further reflection, the above landmark cases raise more questions that leave readers bewildered. The first landmark case involves a campaign for tourism promotion, targeting primarily expatriate Greeks. The PR community in Greece unanimously agrees that the tourism campaign of 1951–1952 denotes the birth of PR in Greece.

The fact that tourism is a privileged site for implementing PR activities is brought out in the case of the American agency “Foote, Cone & Biolding Co.” that was designated by GNTO to run a tourism promotion campaign in Europe, USA and Egypt. Two facts have not been given sufficient attention. First, 1951 was designated by the Government as the year to celebrate the expatriate Greeks. The connection with tourism is apparent as specific expatriate Greek communities formed a well-identified target group. Second, GNTO did not go through the regular channels of issuing a public tender to select the best offer. Instead GNTO Director Demetris Papaefstratiou accepted without questioning the

recommendation of Trevor Christie, the Deputy Assistant of the Tourism Section of Economic Cooperation Administration/Greece (ECA/G) and offered the contract to the American advertising agency. The 6-month contract stipulated 22,500 dollars to be allocated for placing ads in newspapers and periodicals of Europe and Egypt and 22,325\$ for publicity (propaganda) in Europe, the US and Egypt. Publicity was understood to include feature stories in foreign wide circulation newspapers and periodicals, scheduling of lectures to foreign audiences on the theme of Greece, and the organization of festivities for the entertainment of foreign tourists in foreign audiences (Athanassiou and Alifragkis, 2012). GNTO's contract with the foreign advertising agency raised eyebrows among Greek-based advertisers. The Pan-Hellenic Union of Advertisers sent on April 16, 1951, an open letter to the Prime-Minister complaining of unfair treatment. To back up their case, they emphasized they are better suited than the foreign agency to touch upon the sensitive soul of expatriate Greeks and return them back to Greece for a visit (Eleftheria, 1951).

It appears a bit paradoxical to pinpoint this campaign as the signal that would usher in the emergence of the new practice of PR in Greece. At least two incongruities arise from the reading of the situation. The agency in charge of designing and executing the campaign was an American multinational agency, not a Greek one. Furthermore, the agency had advertising as its remit, it was not a public relations agency. To clear these inconsistencies, PR professionals and scholars could easily respond that the American agency employed the services of ADEL, a Greek advertising agency which had been collaborating since May of 1947 with Manos Pavlidis, the "patriarch of Greek PR". Pavlidis headed the newly founded PR department of ADEL from 1952 to 1957 (Design Magazine, 2015). We can extrapolate that the tourism campaign has been hailed an important landmark of PR practice since ADEL was the first agency to create a department solely dealing with communication and relations with the public. The fact though still remains that the birthplace of Greek public relations was within an advertising agency. This observation underscores the close interlink of public relations with advertising from the onset of PR practice in Greece.

The second case regarding the festivities commemorating the 1900th anniversary in 1951 of the arrival of St Paul the Apostle to Greece is also related to tourism, in particular religious tourism. A 20-member committee mostly of ecclesiastical leaders was set up to approve and coordinate the festivities, aided by a press office. In planning the festivities, the organizers had an international elite audience in mind. The real organizational work, though, was carried out by a five-member Executive Committee headed by theology professor Amilkas Alivizatos. The Committee sent invitations to a number of constituents. First the Churches: to Orthodox Patriarchates and Churches, to the Pope and the Roman Catholic Churches, to Anglican Churches all over the world and to Lutheran Churches in Europe and the US; Second, to 10 Church Councils; Third, to Theological Seminaries in Greece and abroad; Fourth, to esteemed clerics and theologians; Fifth, to state agencies and the press, domestic as well as foreign; Sixth, to Christian organizations and student clubs in Greece.

Moreover, the Church of Greece solicited the help of student organizations, mainly Christian in nature, of the Greek branch of the American Express Travel Company and of

the Greek shipping company Aegean steamboats of Typaldos Bros. The last two organizations became sponsors of services along with the Bank of Greece and the Greek government that offered some funding (Alivizatos, 1953).

The involvement of American Express Travel Company in the festivities was a by-product of two interrelated factors. It is well known that American Express was advising US Administrations in late '40s-early '50s on tourism proposing plans for transatlantic tourist flows from US to war-torn Europe. Time magazine in the 27th March edition of 1950 characteristically attributed to the company the label "Private State Department" (Vlachos, 2016). The endorsement of religious festivities that would bring eminent visitors from all over the world to Greece at the height of the Cold War was in line with US official policy and the heavy dependence of Greece at the time on US economic support. The Director of American Express Travel Company, Dimitris Papaefstratiou, an individual with a life-long personal and professional involvement in matters of Greek tourism, was esteemed and trusted by American officials operating in Greece at the time and Greek political leaders alike (Vlachos, 2016). Although Papaefstratiou was not at the helm of the American Express Travel Company in mid-June 1951 when the 2-week long festivities were held because he had accepted, upon request from American officials in Greece, to head the re-institutionalization of the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) (Vlachos, 2016), one can surmise that he was actively involved in the initial planning phase of festivities.

The American Express Travel Co covered the in-land transportation of all attendees from Thessaloniki to Preveza whereas the Typaldos Shipping Co made available the ship "Aegean" for reaching religious destinations by boat. Upon arriving in Athens, the invited guests boarded the ship for the city of Kavala and a visit to Mt. Athos. The following two-three days they visited Thessaloniki and Veroia and on the sixth day they sailed for Crete followed by a visit to Rhodes. From Rhodes they began the return trip visiting first Corinth and ending the trip in Athens where they attended a chorus at the Herodus Atticus theater, visited museums and were invited guests to dinners offered by the Government (Alivizatos, 1953).

The third case refers to ISOLA, a Greek private company of electrical appliances established in 1930, one of the first companies that designed and implemented PR programs. After the turbulent years of World War II, ISOLA managed to restart operations thanks to a loan of 600.000 US\$ it received from Marshall Fund and an additional amount of 300.000 US\$ it raised from selling stocks (Hellenic Wealth, 1955). ISOLA, upon receiving funding from the Marshall Plan, introduced to the market the first Greek electrical home appliances, kitchen and refrigerator. The company dominated the Greek market throughout the '50s and was paradigmatic for instigating public relations programs and exhibiting genuine concern for the well-being of its workforce. The person behind the company's emphasis on PR and human relations was again Manos Pavlidis. It is noteworthy that the first book of Pavlidis (1955) on the subject was prefaced by George Drakos, the CEO of Isola and Vice-President of the Association of Greek Industrialists (SEV) and Chrysostomos Papadopoulos, the CEO of ADEL, the advertising company. Drakos, tracing the origins of PR practice to the foresight of American businesspersons, opined that human relations emerged out of the dual role of an industrial corporation to

engage as an economic actor in productive and profit-making activities and to instill as a social actor a climate of trust and friendly atmosphere both internally between management and employees and externally between the corporation and consumers (Pavlidis, 1955). Theofilou and Watson (2014) report that Pavlidis attended a meeting with D. Clarke, the communication director of the Marshall Plan, in Hotel Grande Bretagne, where supposedly the function and value of public relations were raised and discussed.

## **Precedents of Greek PR practice: mega events aimed at image promotion of Greece**

Taking the first two landmark events as the point of departure and looking back in Greek history, it is our contention that the history of public relations in Greece is intimately connected to mega-events/event management as well as to tourism. Under the rubric mega-events we include national and international art exhibits, trade fairs and exhibitions, athletic games and tournaments, festivals, commemorations and ceremonies, festivals, major conferences, congresses and symposia, etc. Event management and tourism promotion can be traced to mega events taking place in the second half of the nineteenth century and to the creation of Office of Foreigners and Exhibitions as part of the Ministry of National Economy in 1914 by the Liberal Party of Eleftherios Venizelos with the avowed purpose to promote the international standing of Greece (Matthiopoulos, 2009; Vlachos, 2016).

To grasp the link between public relations and tourism in the Greek context, we need to understand the special place ancient Greece occupies in the minds of enlightened Europeans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and locate the emergence of tourism and public relations within larger developments taking place in transport and scientific discoveries. For European aristocrats, a trip to Rome and Athens was a way to come in physical contact, not just through reading, with the marvels of the Western civilization, experience them firsthand and in the process discover their own cultural roots. Actually, British aristocrats who had traveled to the Orient were members of the Society of Dilettanti, a learned travel club founded in London in 1732 (Vingopoulou, 2003). Greece therefore occupies a special place in Western imagination (Leontis, 1995) as evidenced also by the wave of philhellenism in the nineteenth century and the support offered to the Greek War of Independence (Beaton, 2021; Miliori, 2009). Up until the onset of the nineteenth century, traveling to Greece is considered a personal quest for fulfillment and a search for discovering the roots of one's own past (Koulouri, 2021). The situation would change drastically around the 1830s due to a number of developments in industry, transport, communication and science. In industry, higher levels of economic growth enabled more people to travel, slowly giving rise to mass tourism and the incipient tourism industry. In the nineteenth century, Greece becomes part of the Grand Tour. In transport, steam powered ships made traveling easier and more entertaining. The first steam engine ship sailed in the Eastern Mediterranean in early 1830s. In communication, the invention of telegraphs in the 1830s-1840s facilitated long-distance communication and dissemination of news to foreign audiences. In the decade of 1870s, all major Greek newspapers collaborated with the international news agencies of Reuters and Havas and

the Telegraphic Agency of Stefanopoulos was established in 1875. In science, the invention of photography in 1839 enriched texts with pictures and illustrations and would render traveling a memorable experience. The Acropolis and other ancient sites along with portraits began to be featured in picture books, post cards, albums, and posters.

Taken together, all these developments transform wander travelers into tourists (Vingopoulou, 2003) and would have a profound impact on the mobility of people, the speedy circulation of news via telegrams and the promotion of national images with the use of lithography and photography. By pinpointing processes and developments that were underway in the nineteenth century, we are hinting at the formation of an incipient system of national image promotion combining text with pictures. The same processes that gave rise to the emergence of mass tourism and the concomitant tourism industry could be also operating in forging links among writers, poets, journalists, photographers and artists for the purposes of image promotion, public relations, propaganda and advertising. In the first recorded essay on advertising in Greece, the playwright Michael Lambros (1894) lists a number of public notifications that appeared in the press as precursors of advertisements. Lambros locates the beginnings of advertising in Greece around mid-1870s when there existed a sizeable press readership to engage in commercial advertising. Notifications, though, appeared as early as 1841 and their subject matter varied ranging from information regarding amenities in hotels and hotel resorts to lost and found items to theater performances and to baptism and wedding ceremonies. It is noteworthy that in notifications pertaining to weddings or dinners, the toast was delivered by poets who recited verses of poems or songs. Thus, it is worth pondering whether these notifications could be included as “PR-like” activities in a definitive treatise on the history of public relations in Greece.

Concerning mega-events of the mid-19th century and throughout the 20th century we observe the intersection of athletics-sports and culture with tourism and cultural/public diplomacy. Great sports events like the Olympic Games and Expos are the two mega-events genres that appeared in late nineteenth century (Roche, 2003). Greece was a host or a participant in a number of mega-events/exhibitions. At the national level, the nascent Greek state organized the Zappeian Olympiads. On the international scene, Greece participated in a number of international exhibitions held in London in 1851 (Grand Tour) and 1862 and in Paris in 1867, 1878, and 1889 (Koulouri, 2021; Skiadas, 2003). By its participation, Greece wanted to showcase to the world that the country was on the course of adopting and following Western-oriented trends in arts and commerce, (Kosmadaki, 2012). The most important mega-event on an international scale was the hosting of the first Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896.

### *The Zappeian Olympiads*

On the domestic front, the link between economic prosperity and athletics taking shape in the form of exhibitions of agricultural and light industry products accompanied by sporting events can be traced back to the Royal Decree issued in 1837 stipulating the establishment of a committee charged with improving product quality by linking economically induced activities to athletic contests open to the wider public. Four nationwide

exhibitions known as the Zappeian Olympiads held between 1859 and 1888 provided the impetus for the implementation of the Royal Decree (Skiadas, 2003). The Zappeian Olympiads, a precursor of the first Olympic Games, aimed at showcasing achievements in the areas of culture, trade and sports. Sporting events were an important appendage of all four exhibitions whose main purpose was the furtherance of trade and its contribution to national economic progress. The number of exhibitors kept rising with each successive Zappeian Olympiad: 1116 in the first of 1859, 1119 in the second of 1870, 1271 in the third of 1875 and 1322 in the fourth of 1888. The same ascending trend can be observed in the number of visitors to the trade fairs and spectators to the sporting events. Out of 40,000 residents of Athens in 1859, 20,000 attended the first Zappeian Olympiad and by the third Olympiad the number had tripled (Skiadas, 2003). The linking of trade fairs with sporting events as well as the preoccupation with portraying Greece to international audiences as a nascent state following in the path of other European states on the road to modernization figured prominently in the minds of the Greek elites and the organizers of the Zappeian Olympiads. In the words of the organizing committee of the second Zappeian Olympiad: “the Greek authorities and citizens should not forget that in this country, a nation’s strength and reputation are mainly dependent on growth and improvement of all realms of national activity” (Skiadas, 2003: 63).

### *The 1896 Athens Olympics*

The same preoccupation with bolstering Greece’s international image became even more pronounced due to changing circumstances in the case of assuming the responsibility of organizing in Athens the first international Olympic Games in 1896. In June 1894, the first International Olympic Committee convened in Paris and decided to select Athens as the site of the modern Olympics. There was not any doubt in the minds of committee members that Greece should be honored and accorded the invitation as the birthplace of the ancient Olympic Games that would be revitalized in the modern era. In his remarks to fellow committee members and participants of the Congress for the Revival of the Olympic Games, President Demetrios Vikelas, a Greek intellectual, expressed the view that modern Greeks together with other Westerners shared a common cultural heritage going back to the ancient Greeks, alluded to the common bond uniting modern Greeks with other Westerners as descendants of ancient Greeks and elaborated on the attractiveness of Athens for foreign athletes and visitors by making references to sites of archaeological interest (the Acropolis, other monuments, museums) and to modern amenities (hotels, coffee-houses, restaurants and theaters) (Linardos and Vikelas, 2002). One can discern in the allusion of Vikelas vestiges of occidentalism. As a modern Greek, Vikelas shared with his European interlocutors the conception of Athens as the cradle of Western civilization and, as a man of letters, attempted to impress upon them the idea that modern Athenians, living among the ancient ruins of glorious Athens, were indebted to their ancestors much alike the enlightened Europeans who had re-discovered ancient Greece in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As stated by modern Greek historian Koulouri (2010: 2021): “reference to the ancestral relation with the ancient

Hellenes supplied the modern Greeks with self-confidence and provided them with the 'passport' to acceptability in the family of modern 'civilised' nations".

The news of the selection announcement was received with mixed feelings in Athens. The government at the time of Prime Minister Charilaos Trikoupis believed Greece couldn't live up to the expectations given the dire economic situation the country was experiencing. In December 1893, Trikoupis had appeared before the Greek Parliament to declare state bankruptcy with the country defaulting on its external loans and its national currency in ruins. To allay the reservations of the government, Baron Pierre de Coubertin and Vikelas visited Athens in October 1894 and found a receptive ear for Athens hosting the first modern Olympic Games among Theodoros Deligiannis, King George and Crown Prince Constantine who felt that the organization of the first modern Olympic Games would boost the morale of the Greek people and restore the image and credibility of the country abroad. The Olympic Games were viewed as a turning point in uplifting the morale of the people and presenting an image of Greece in accordance with the philhellenic feelings prevalent in the West. The public sentiment was succinctly expressed in the official picture book of the Olympic Games which stated that the games offered "moral regeneration after the hardships suffered from the bankruptcy of the nation and the humiliation abroad (Skiadas, 2003: 93). The supporters of the proposal envisioned the Olympic Games as "a strategic opportunity to promote the nation-state and its values, and to articulate national identity to audiences at home and abroad (L'Etang et al., 2007:74).

Following the resignation of Trikoupis in January 1895, the road was clear for the government of Deligiannis which assumed power in May 1895 to immediately embrace the invitation to host the first Olympic Games of the modern era. Within a 15-month interval, Greece had to amass all the necessary resources and engage in preparations for organizing the first international mega-event of its modern history scheduled to take place in late March-early April of 1896. A Greek Olympic Committee was formed headed by Crown Prince Constantine. The first priority of the Committee was to garner funds given the lack of government funds. The fundraising campaign consisted of issuing Olympic postage stamps, raising money through public subscription and appealing for financial support to Greek merchants in Greece and abroad. Prince Constantine contacted a number of wealthy Greek merchants residing abroad and Timoleon Philemon, the secretary-general of the Committee, was instrumental in securing the generous donation of merchant Georgios Averoff, a wealthy merchant from Alexandria in Egypt, for the construction of the Panathenaic Stadium. Other expatriate wealthy Greeks who contributed funds included Andreas Syngros, Christakis Zografos, Marinos Korgialenios and Leon Melas (Skiadas, 2003). The endorsement of the first modern Olympic Games by expatriate Greek wealthy merchants could be considered as a "proto-sponsoring" activity. Philemon, for instance, suggested that the financial donations of the Egyptian-based wealthy Greeks were a sort of reimbursement for the protection the Greek state offered to them. For their generosity, the Greek state would show its gratitude and be obliged to them (Grapsa-Liakakou, 2002). The Olympic Committee also oversaw the undertaking of major infrastructural projects such as creation of athletic facilities, construction of roads and bridges, the lighting of the city as well as the cleaning up of streets.

Vikelas, the President of the International Olympic Committee, and Philemon, the General Secretary of the Athens-based Organizing Committee, performed a number of tasks which by contemporary standards would be classified as PR-like activities. Approximately forty days before the opening of the Games, both were active in engaging the press. By keeping close contact with foreign correspondents and supplying them with information, Philemon worked towards generating positive publicity in newspapers and periodicals (Tsonias, 2016). Vikelas, for his part, arranged for telegrams, modern day press releases, to be dispatched to newspapers (Linardos and Vikelas, 2002). News circulated by press agencies via telegrams were considered to be more authoritative than newspaper reports filled by correspondents in Athens. In February 1896, the Paris-based press agency “Agence Nationale” opened and operated an office in Athens to promote the Games and entice foreign visitors to attend the sporting and cultural events in conjunction with visits to ancient monuments and archaeological sites (Grapsa-Liakakou, 2002).

Notwithstanding the painstaking efforts of Vikelas and Philemon, the publicity generated was not sufficient to attract foreign visitors. The actual number of tourists fell short of the expectations of the organizers. Although Philemon had estimated close to 35,000 arrivals, the number of foreign visitors attending the Athens Olympics were only 5,000 (Grapsa-Liakakou, 2002; Linardos and Vikelas, 2002). Members of the press attributed the poor showing to the fact that the Organizing Committee was busy rushing to complete on time the athletic facilities and overlooked promotion activities and advertising to foreign audiences. Irrespective of the number of attendees, the idea of attracting tourists was prevalent among officials and preparations were underway for welcoming visitors from abroad the last two months before the opening ceremony of the Games. Telegrams and newspaper articles featured price of rooms in hotels as well as rooms to let made available by residents. A number of foreign steamships were converted to hotels in order to accommodate European visitors (Skiadas, 2003). The British travel agency Thomas Cook opened in 1889 a branch in Athens (Koulouri, 2021) which rendered services to foreigners regarding the availability and renting of rooms during the Olympic Games (Grapsa-Liakakou, 2002) and organized special tour packages for European customers interested in attending the games (Vlachos, 2016). To attract tourists from Europe, the Cook agency posted announcements, programs and advertisements in newspapers, placed artistically designed programs of the games at the entrance of major European railway stations and printed a tourist guide of Greece featuring important archaeological sites of interest. Likewise, the German travel agency Stangent on the occasion of the games advertised in major German newspapers tours to Greece and printed and circulated in major German cities a luxurious travel guide (Tzachrista, 2004). Many tourists that came for the games took pictures with their photographic cameras and were eager to take back home post cards and albums showing archaeological sites and antiquities (Koulouri, 2021).

In the area of publicity, a number of initiatives can be singled out as PR-like activities intended for both domestic and international audiences. A new series of post stamps circulated for purchase depicting Hermes the ancient messenger God, the Acropolis and snapshots of ancient games like discus throwing, wrestling and boxing. Bronze medals engraved with the year and emblem of the games were also sold as souvenirs

(Graspa-Liakakou, 2002). Two authoritative works were published in 1896. The official publication of the games entitled “The Olympic Games, 776 BC – 1896” was published in Greek, English, French and German and a book entitled “The Illustrated Panorama of the Olympic Games” was published in Greek and French and became popular among foreign visitors because it blended new material on excavations at Olympia in the description of ancient games (Koulouri, 2010). Newspapers were engaged in the drafting and printing of classified advertisements for the benefit of businesspersons during the games. Characteristic is the appeal of Athenian daily “Akropolis” printed on March 5 1896:

“Gentlemen, merchants, industrialists and those of you who have something you want publicized among the foreign visitors, something to recommend, something to advertise: reserve space for a classified advertisement in one or more of three languages. Advertisements can also be drafted by our account’s office. All English, French, German classified ads. So that everyone will read them and everybody will shop from you, so that you will make a penny from everybody” (Skiadas, 2003: 115, 117).

The appeal bore fruit as dozens of merchants and traders not only advertised their products and services but went out of their way to offer them to future winners of the games (Skiadas, 2003).

The first modern Olympic Games lasted for ten days, from March 25 to April 3, 1896. The timing was imbued with considerable symbolic significance given that the opening day coincided with the day of national independence and the duration of the games with Easter holidays. More than 300 athletes, representing 13 countries with the majority originating from Greece, participated in the games. American and European newspapers provided favorable coverage of the games due in part to dispatches of foreign correspondents sent to Athens (Spantidakis, 2017). Although the games generated considerable press coverage in Greece and abroad (Koulouri, 2009), the Greek state was not able to ripe in the long run the benefits emanating from positive publicity and tourism flows.

### *The Greek state as initiator of PR-like activities*

Considering the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the starting point, the undisputable fact remains that PR in Greece sprang from state-led efforts to modernize, catch-up with the rest of Europe and, in doing so, boost the image of Greece abroad. This national goal galvanized the interest of members of the upper class, societal clubs, and trade associations. The interwar period, in our view, provided the context for the onset of PR-like activities due to a number of factors. Following the defeat to the Turks in Asia Minor in 1922, Greece’s priority centered inwards to economic and societal modernization. Along with the emphasis successive governments placed on infrastructural projects, the area of tourism was recognized for its economic potential. The stage was set for tourism to become a mass phenomenon under the banner of “industry of the foreigners” substituting the conception of the tourist for the previously held conception of the upper-class traveler (Vlachos, 2016). Last but not least, a developed media system was beginning to take shape comprising of printed media, radio, and films. By 1927 there

existed 261 newspapers of which 67 were Athenian and 30 of them were dailies (Mayer, 1959). There was also a flourishing publication of specialized periodicals numbering close to 260 in Athens by mid-1930s (Mayer, 1960). The Athens News Agency was founded in 1905 upon the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The first radio station was established in 1928 and a decade later the authoritarian regime of Ioannis Metaxas operated a national radio station (Zaharopoulos, 2002).

In the twentieth century and increasingly during the interwar period 1922-1940 state departments and agencies assumed responsibility for designing and implementing aspects of what constitutes in our times the PR function. In 1910, a Press Office operated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to a) gather information and news from abroad as well as locate permanent correspondents, b) publish monographs and leaflets on issues deemed important for cultivating a favorable climate in public opinion, and c) increase the pool of writers and publicists who could make inroads into the pages of the International Press (Tselika, 1980). The first Press Office attached to the Prime-Minister's Office was set up by the liberal Venizelos government on April 1, 1930. Besides reviewing the press on a daily basis and reporting for cases warranting the attention of the government, the Press Office was commissioning government officials to write articles on specific topics which were subsequently forwarded to newspapers to keep the public informed (Tselika, 1980).

As has already been stated, the Venizelos government was the first to establish the Office of Foreigners and Exhibitions under the Ministry of National Economy in 1914. The emphasis on Foreigners meant that the Office intended to supply through articles, guides, maps, and leaflets information that would attract and prolong the stay of foreigners in the country. The Office commissioned Franco-Swiss photographer Fred Boissonnas to produce a series of albums promoting the image of Greece among foreign audiences (Vlachos, 2016). The emphasis on Exhibitions underlined the country/s need to organize exhibitions domestically and participate in exhibitions abroad to promote "the national produce" and the image of Greece (Vlachos, 2016). Due to the outbreak of World War I and the ensuing National Schism in Greece, the Office came to a standstill for a number of years till it was re-established in 1922. After a brief period of inaction, the Office shared with the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO), a state agency founded in 1929, overlapping jurisdiction over exhibitions for the period 1929-1935 (Vlachos, 2016).

To demonstrate the link between PR and Exhibitions, we will allude to two examples. The first example refers to the participation of Greece in two art exhibitions held both in Paris in 1925 and 1937; the second example deals with the promotion of Greek tobacco at the International Spring Fair of Leipzig in 1926. The common element of these two examples concerns the promotion of Greek art and products abroad in an attempt to present to foreign audiences Greece as a modern country worthy of attention. The difference lies in the actors involved and the implications derived for PR. In the art exhibitions example, the state, through the apparatus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, assumed responsibility for planning and coordinating all activities related to Greece's participation. In the tobacco example, private organizations such as the Greek-German Chamber of Commerce in Berlin and the Tobacco Merchant Federation of Greece played active roles.

The participation of Greece in the art exhibitions of Paris in 1925 (April-October) and 1937 (May-November) intended to promote an image of Greece as being conversant with European artistic currents and able to showcase its own synthesis of modernism with tradition (Kosmadaki, 2015). What though, stands out as a feature with specific ramifications for PR is the role of Nikolaos Politis who served as National Commissioner of the Greek Pavilion on both occasions. Politis, a seasoned lawyer, diplomat and politician, was a close confidant of Venizelos and became Foreign Minister three times. Since 1924, he was stationed in Paris serving as Ambassador of Greece to France. He owed the appointment to the role of National Commissioner for the first time to his knowledge and personal rapport with Venizelos and his experience in 1925 held sway among officials of the authoritarian Metaxas regime to propose the post to him in the summer of 1936 (Kosmadaki, 2015). As a National Commissioner, Politis was in constant contact with the participating artists, participated in committees set by the French organizers and selected advisors and collaborators. An architect, a sculptor and a painter, all ex-patriate Greeks residing in France, were among his advisors in the 1925 exhibit (Kosmadaki, 2012) and a commercial attache was his collaborator responsible for technical and administrative matters in the 1937 exhibit (Kosmadaki, 2015). Politis was also involved in the preparations leading up to the final list of Greek participants. His initial attempts to contact and secure the involvement of reputed Greek artists as well as the input of two museums in the 1925 exhibit went unheeded. Two other areas where one could ascertain Politis' performance in the 1925 exhibit was his handling of media relations and whether the objective of promoting the distinctive aspects of Greek creations was met successfully. Press reports were ambivalent in their evaluation on both counts (Kosmadaki, 2012). Finally, as an ambassador Politis was actively involved in a plethora of PR-like activities ranging from securing funding for establishing chair of Neo-Hellenic Studies in French universities to facilitating the welcoming reception of the works of Greek artists and musicians by French audiences and even offering a helping hand in the preparations of the Delphi festivities (Kosmadaki, 2012).

### *The nexus of PR and tourism in the interwar period*

Realizing the increasing importance of tourism flows, the Venizelos government (1928–1932) founded the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) in March 1929, as a public legal entity under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Economy. The public nature of the Organization underscored the need to formulate a general tourism strategy and play the role of a coordination mechanism among the various tourist stakeholders. The list of the 35-member Board of Directors included directors of state agencies, local government officials, journalists, and representatives of chambers of commerce and industry, chambers of hoteliers and travel agencies. The GNTO sought to promote tourism in Greece and abroad and for that purpose specific tasks were assigned to six Directorates. Two out of the six directorates dealt with issues germane to PR. The Directorate of Celebrations, Congresses and Exhibitions had, as mentioned overlapping jurisdiction with the Office of Foreigners and Exhibitions, and the Directorate of Press, Propaganda, Advertising and Publications. The first of the two Directorates organized in the early '30s

the participation of the country in a number of international tourism exhibitions in Europe, and revitalized popular festivities like festivals and carnivals as well as used ancient sites for staging the Delphi Festival and award ceremonies in Olympia in an effort to attract domestic crowds and prolong the stay of foreign visitors in Greece (Vlachos, 2015). The second Directorate concentrated in publishing and disseminating tourist information through leaflets, a tourist calendar, the circulation of a newsletter in four languages and the distribution of many posters to Greek embassies abroad, the press, travel agencies, chambers of commerce and shipping companies. As recorded in a report for internal use, the documents of tourism propaganda sent abroad were in excess of 30 and weighted six tones (Vlachos, 2016).

In promoting the national image of Greece abroad, the GNTO had to collaborate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In June 1932, the Director of GNTO Konstantinos Melas addressed a letter to the Greek ambassador in Paris requesting him to liaise with journalists and publicists in order to persuade them to include Greece in their writings (Ekriti, 2014). Melas accompanied his letter with tourism brochures and posters in an effort to promote Greece as a tourism destination to French nationals. A year later, the proposals on the subject of the Greek ambassador in Paris addressed to government officials in Athens would display remarkable PR savvy. In his April 1933 communication, he opined that cultivating personal relationships with journalists and the philhellenism some of them exhibited were not sufficient for generating positive media coverage on Greece. Instead, the ambassador urged his counterparts in Athens to consider subsidizing major French periodicals and organizing invited tours to Greece for French journalists and intellectuals who upon their return back home would become the country's best brand ambassadors (Ekriti, 2014; Tomai, 2008).

The dictatorial regime of Ioannis Metaxas that took over power in 1936 abolished the two state agencies of Office of Foreigners and Exhibitions and the Greek National Tourist Organization and their functions were merged and transferred to the Sub-Ministry of Press and Tourism, a government structure that was attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Aside from the interconnections of tourism with publicity for the obvious reason of tourism promotion, the fusion of press and tourism under a single government structure served the dual purpose of censoring and controlling the content and flow of information and promulgating a coherent state ideology (Vlachos, 2015). Alike the Mussolini's dictatorial regime in Italy (Bini et al., 2011), the Metaxas propaganda apparatus promoted a "collectivist and nationalist" ethos leaving little room for individual initiative and elevated the state as the sole arbiter of expressing the national will (Sarantis, 1993). In that respect, the regime exerted a strong grip on tourism promotion in order to be aligned with the dictates of crafting and disseminating a coherent national public image (Vlachos, 2016).

According to an Emergency Law issued on August 31, 1936 the Sub-Ministry dealt with all issues involving 'the education' of public opinion. The Sub-Ministry encompassed within its purview issues related to domestic and foreign press, congresses and exhibitions, theater and cinema, lectures, publications, advertisement, and radio programs (Petraki, 2006). Organizationally, the Sub-Ministry was divided into six Directorates, two of which dealt with the domestic and foreign press respectively and the rest with tourism.

Of particular relevance to PR were the activities of the Directorate of Thermal Springs and Exhibitions and the Directorate of Tourism Development. The promotion of Greek tourism abroad fell under the jurisdiction of these two Directorates. In its first year of operation, the Directorate responsible with Exhibitions participated in 2 conferences on 4 international exhibitions held in Paris, Izmir, Leipzig and Bari, 16 thematic congresses, and a conference in Berlin dedicated to tourism propaganda ([Publications of 4th of August, 1937](#)). The great bulk of tourism promotion activities, though, centered on the Directorate of Tourism Development. In particular, the Directorate was entrusted with the task of disseminating material in the form of publications, posters and advertisements to foreign audiences. To accomplish the task, it created tourist offices in Paris, Cairo and Alexandria of Egypt, entered into contracts with advertising agencies for tourism promotion in the markets of the USA and the United Kingdom and sought the collaboration of Greek consulates and foreign travel agencies ([Vlachos, 2016](#)). During the 1936–1937 period, the Directorate published and circulated a quarterly periodical in English, French and German, collaborated with the House of R. Moreillon for making available tourist information in Switzerland and distributed through its Paris office the booklet “Le Voyage en Grece” ([Publications of the 4th of August, 1937](#)).

### **Tourism as the privileged site for initiating the American led professional PR practice in postwar Greece**

The state-directed PR activities came to a standstill in the 1940s, as Greece was entangled in World War II (1941–1945) and the subsequent Greek civil war (1946–1949). A decisive moment that tilted the balance in favor of the national forces in the civil war and determined its outcome as well as subsequent developments for at least the next two decades was the provision of American aid through the Truman Doctrine (March 1947) and the Marshall Plan (1948–1953).

Beginning in late 1940s and throughout the 1950s American influence was pervasive in all spheres of Greek life. Politically, the Americans favored working with right or right of center governments, seeking political stability by holding the left forces at bay; economically, they intended to put Greece, through the provision of economic aid, on the path to economic recovery; culturally, they tried to envision Greece as a country belonging to the Western family of nations amenable to the American lifestyle and adhering to the liberal principles of individual choice, private property, and freedom of speech ([Lialouti, 2019](#); [Stathakis, 2004](#)). The American dominance was most pronounced in areas amenable to soft power mechanism like publicity/propaganda, public diplomacy, advertising/PR and political analysis/polling.

Although the Americans initially drafted economic plans to reform the state and revitalize industry, they soon realized that internal obstacles like political corruption and favoritism, inability of specialized private interests to honor their commitments, and inexperienced civil servants to name a few rendered the project obsolete ([Alifragkis and Athanassiou, 2013](#); [Vlachos, 2016](#)). Within a couple of years, the Americans abandoned the project and were looking for quick solutions. Tourism they thought, offered the potential for speedy growth. A number of high-level American officials of Economic

Recovery Administration (ECA), the agency responsible for making available and monitoring aid of the Marshall Plan, were making public statements throughout 1949 preparing the ground for Greece's urgent need to develop tourism. First, William Foster, the Deputy Administrator of ECA indicated in January 1949 that Greece held a special place in the hearts and minds of American tourists (Kyrtsis, 2015). In March 1949, John Nuveen Jr., the head of ECA in Greece signaled in an interview that "...the re-establishment of the tourism industry, which must play a very important part in Greece's future economy" was a top priority for his Agency (Alifragkis and Athanassiou, 2013: 701). Thinking that Greece had the potential of becoming the "California of Europe" (Stathakis, 2004) Paul Hoffman, urged Greeks to follow along this path, characteristically stating in August 1949:

"Your country is literary crying out for tourism! You have the most celebrated natural landscapes, traditional hospitality, world-renowned archaeological sites and a wonderful climate. Much needs to be done of course, but you shall succeed if you remember that you are Greek" (Colonas, 2015: 65).

The Greek government heeded the calls of the American officials and the GNTO was enacted in October 1950 and became again fully operational in January 1951. At this point our analysis has come full circle, for it was the newly recreated GNTO that assigned, upon the advice of American officials, the tourism promotion campaign to the American advertising agency of Foote, Cone & Biedling Co, the Americans shaped the development of postwar PR in Greece and Greek PR practitioners treated the American PR practice as a model worthy of emulation.

## Conclusion

The origins of Greek PR can be traced all the way back to the organizing of mega events in the areas of tourism, culture and trade during the second half of the nineteenth century culminating in the first modern Olympic games in Athens in 1896. Certainly, tourism and national image promotion have been a privileged domain for undertaking PR-like activities, both in the pre-professionalization era and the postwar professionalization phase of Greek PR. We have identified tourism and national image promotion to be the missing link that has eluded the attention of PR practitioners and academics. Tourism and national image promotion provide the connecting threads linking the pre-professional era of organizing the Zappeian Olympiads, the Olympic Games and of state-led tourism promotion in the interwar period to the professionalization era marked by the Americanization of Greek PR practice in the postwar period as documented in the tourism advertising campaign and the organizing of a religious tourism mega event in the early 1950s. The preponderant influence of the US in Greece in late 1940s and throughout the 1950s shaped the focus of many development projects and the thinking of the early PR practitioners. In two out of three landmark events geared to international audiences, Pavlidis was involved in the tourism campaign case and Papamichalakis in the religious festivities celebrating the coming of St Paul to Greece 1900 years ago (Varvounis, n.d).

In the pre-professional era, PR was mainly state-led, practiced by government officials who at times collaborated with private interests. Organizing the representation of Greece in athletic and cultural events and international trade fairs as well as promoting Greece as a tourist destination were the two main foci of PR-like activities. Our research has identified and analyzed a number of state-led mega-events aimed at national image promotion. Our treatment of the Zappeian Olympiads and the Athens Olympic Games in the nineteenth century as well as Greece's participation in international art and tourism exhibitions in the early twentieth century resembles the emphasis of state initiated and sponsored mega events like the beauty contests and Turkey's participation in international exhibitions in the early twentieth century that have been identified as milestones in Turkey's PR historiography during the single-party period (1920–1946) (Bıçaklı and Hürmeric, 2013; Özdemir, 2016). Employing national image promotion, state elites in Greece and Turkey tried to impress their Western counterparts and showcase the strides their countries had made towards Western modernity. In both countries, the term “public relations” was first used in the postwar period. At the dawn of the PR professional era, the preponderant influence of the US in Greece in late 1940s and throughout the '50s shaped the focus of many development projects, the thinking of the early Greek PR practitioners and the evolution of postwar PR practice.

Under an historical context-sensitive lens, the three landmarks events that ushered the postwar professional PR practice are not treated as isolated events but form an integral part of an historical narrative. In our analysis, the historiography of PR in Greece is illuminated by the central theme of the tourism and national image promotion - PR nexus that integrates the recollection of early PR practitioners' activities into a broader understanding over the *longue durée*. Although the use of the term public relations in Greece is concomitant with American influence and “importation” of the practice, the emergence of self-styled PR professionals, the setting up and functioning of specialized organizational units, and the development of the media system, we have dispelled the prevalent thus far view that the point of departure for writing Greek PR history originates in late 1940s – early 1950s. Surely, Greek PR professional practice is a recent postwar phenomenon but, by pointing out to a number of milestones in the Greek case, we have identified precedents of professional PR and in the process moved and expanded the chronological boundaries of Greek PR history all the way back to the nineteenth century. Public relations as a term did not appear in the Greek public sphere until after World War II but the terms “propaganda” and “publicity” were used interchangeably to designate “PR-like” or “proto-PR” activities from the mid-nineteenth onwards. In our study we have documented “PR-like” activities of the pre-World War II period in a number of mega-events aimed at tourism and national image promotion. In our review, the state figured prominently as an agent in organizing and coordinating “PR-like” activities

Focusing on a number of mega-events, we have provided the impetus to dig deeper and more thoroughly in the historical record in order to unearth a more comprehensive picture of Greek PR history.

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