

## Questioning Soft Power

### An Empirical Approach of the Reception of Turkish Soap-Operas by Greeks

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#### Abstract

Since the introduction of soft power theory by Joseph Nye, many political and media scientists as well as elite journalists have used this concept in order to analyze the impact of transnational media texts and their effects on local audiences. Despite its popularity, the soft power theory raises several questions that should be taken under consideration. First, it presupposes a direct link between a product's attractiveness and the ability to influence other nations on a diplomatic level. Second, it underestimates the complexity of the reception process of media texts by the audiences and third, it does not take under consideration the complexity of the relationship between two countries which may be defined by historic and strategic elements and in which soft power may play only a limited role.

Through this article we present the results of our empirical research concerning the reception of Turkish soap-operas by the audience in Greece. Undeniably, Turkish soap-operas attract Greek audiences for several reasons such as cultural proximity, identity negotiation, alternative storylines etc. and which may conduct activities in relation to these particular soap-operas (i.e. soap-opera induced tourism) or to Turkish civilization in general (i.e. learning Turkish language). However, this attraction should not be confounded with the desire to overcome long-enduring rivalries and negative feelings that are due to tangible as well as on emotional elements in order to follow Turkish government's interests as soft power theory suggests. Therefore, the attraction of local audiences by transnational texts such as Turkish soap-operas, should not be considered as a de facto success of Turkey's soft power. Consequently, soft power should rather be used as a communicational intentionality.

Keywords: soft power, transnational soap-operas, cultural proximity, cultural studies, reception, audiences.

## Introduction

Since 1990, when Joseph Nye introduced soft power theory, political and media scientists as well as elite journalists have used this concept in order to analyze the impact of transnational media texts and their effects on local audiences. However, despite its popularity, the theory in question raises several questions that should be taken under consideration. During the last decades, several researchers have worked on the impact of Turkish soap-operas on the audiences of the different countries in which they have been diffused. More precisely, since 2000, the production of Turkish soap-operas is in constant development. These soap-operas have indisputably a great success at a local level and are also exported abroad. More precisely, they were first diffused in countries that were in the sphere of cultural influence of the ancient Ottoman Empire (which means the Balkans and the Middle East). Later they were also exported even far, in Latin America, in China, in Pakistan, in India, in Bangladesh etc.

Among these countries, Greece has become a great consumer of Turkish soap-operas. This consumption has considerably augmented since the economic crisis. During this period, not only the local production has been practically diminished but also according to the European Bank, Greek households were forced to adopt a certain number of strategies in order to affront the new financial situation. These strategies included reducing the consumption of specific goods, discontinuing subscriptions to services (such as phone and internet), postponing payments, obtaining an additional job or increasing the number of working hours etc.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the consumption of "non-necessities" (theatre, cinema, museums etc.) was dramatically reduced since the economic crisis in Greece. Therefore, Turkish soap operas had an ideal context of diffusion, in this country in a state of lack. The current article proposes an empirical research on the effects of Turkish soap-operas on Greek audience and proposes to examine empirically the limitations as far as the use of the term soft power is concerned.

## Methodology

Our study concerns the representations projected by Turkish television soap operas and their reception by fans – particularly by women (as there is a gendered perspective in our research) - in Greece. In order to study the consumption of these soap operas, we have conducted an empirical research based both on qualitative and quantitative methods.

First, we have realized, in 2016 and 2018, a qualitative study based on 50 in depth interviews with individuals having different socio-economic backgrounds, different ages and residing in different geographical areas in Greece. During both research periods, the recruitment of people who participated in our research was realized with convenience sampling and snowball method.

Furthermore, we have realized an online survey from September 2018 to October 2018. This online survey concerned several aspects that had been discussed during interviews but needed to be measured in a larger scale in order to have a more representative image of fan communities.

Considering the fact that the study of the reception of media products must be accompanied by the study of the conditions in which these creations have been produced in order to seize the logic of the communicational intentionality (Scannell & Gamberini, 1994) behind them, we have realized a field study in Istanbul in May 2017 in order to better understand the production process of Turkish soap operas. Within this context, we have realized interviews with producers, actors and personnel that are implicated in the production process of these soap operas.

## Soft Power, Turkish Soap-Operas and Greek Television

The concept of soft power is intrinsically related to the uncertainty that occurred right after the Cold War period. In 1990, Joseph Nye, introduced the concept of soft power in his book entitled *Bound to Lead: The changing Nature of American Power* (Nye, 1990). By developing this notion, Nye, aimed to show that America was not a declining power as many claimed at that time and that this country would continue to be a leader on an international level through its soft power and thus its ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce. More precisely, he distinguished hard power from soft power. Hard power refers to the use of military and economic means to influence the behavior or interests of other nations, while soft power refers to the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. The first is based on coercion and it is often aggressive whereas the second is non-coercive and is based on the attraction through culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2004).

For Nye, soft power is equally important to hard power because as he explains if “a State can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow” (Nye, 1990: 167). Thus, according to him, soft power can prevent the exercise of hard power. Later Nye introduced the term smart power in order to underly the complementarity between soft power and hard power (Nye, 2008). For him, in order to achieve a leading role in international affairs, smart power (the combination of soft power and hard power) is necessary.

Although the concept of soft power has been primarily developed for the case of the United States, during the last decades, it has also been adopted by various countries. Nations’ capacity to make themselves attractive in a digitally connected and globalized media and communication environment has become an important aspect of contemporary international relations. Therefore, soft power is a notion that is being commonly used not only from academics but also from journalists around the globe (Thussu, 2014). Consequently, during the last decades, apart from the U.S global media flows in the entertainment (Disney, Hollywood, MTV, etc.), news and current affairs (CNN, Discovery, etc.) and social media (Google, Facebook, YouTube etc.) sectors, we observe the proliferation of new media flows coming from other countries not only as far as the information sector is concerned

(i.e. U.K., France, Russia, Qatar, India, China, etc.) but also in the entertainment sector with Brazilian telenovelas, Bollywood movies, Korean series, Japanese manga etc. (ibid., 2014). Within this context, the rise of the Turkish serial industry and the worldwide diffusion of Turkish soap-operas have been explained by political and media scientists as well as by journalists as an attempt to enhance Turkey's soft power particularly in countries that were provinces of the ancient Ottoman Empire.

### Turkish Dramas and Neo-Ottomanism: A Turkish Conception of Soft Power

According to Hülya Ugur Tanrıöver (2011), since the beginning of the first television channel in Turkey, soap-operas had a privileged position among other media products. This happens, because as she explains, Turkish audience had already a cinematographic tradition which was established in the "golden age" of Turkish cinema (1960 – 1970). Thus, Turkish audience always had a particular interest for fiction. The crisis in the cinema industry (that occurred during the 1980s) as well as Turkey's financial situation during the same period are some of the reasons that stimulated Turks to massively adopt the entertainment offered by television at home. In the early years of television, when the number of local productions were still very limited, TRT bought series from abroad that were highly appreciated by the public. Their success was so considerable that in social history, certain periods were named in reference to the series in question, such as the "Love Boat Years" or the "Dallas Years". This is one of the reasons why TRT insisted on producing local soap operas. During the nineties, private channels appeared in Turkish television and this caused augmented competitiveness in the sector. Hence, audience abandoned foreign series in the favor of local products. Today, local soap-operas are the most popular television genre in Turkey. The themes of these soap-operas are not original. They remind the practically standardized themes of the classic products of the genre or of the "telenovelas" of the Spanish speaking world of the period 1990 – 2000. The most frequent subjects concern the sentimental relations and the stories of forbidden love between two persons with different social status or between lovers that are in an ambiguous situation because of a third person that is implicated in the relation.

These soap-operas present several stories characterized by the rich lifestyle of the protagonists. Protagonists have a lifestyle that is symbolized by goods, such as expensive clothes, jewelry, furniture or even cultural goods such as frequent trips etc. So, this lifestyle invites the public to a journey towards fantasy, dream and evasion. The narrative schemes that are diffused by these soap operas are identical to those that we find in most of the television products anywhere in the world (life lasting love, optimism, fight between good and bad etc.). It is about presenting problems that preoccupy every person in everyday life (love problems, survival problems etc.) but always by accompanying these problems by intrigues, passions and rivalries in order to attract the public. As mentioned in our introduction, Turkish soap-operas are also (particularly since 2000) exported abroad. This phenomenon coincides with a change of paradigm as far as Turkey's foreign policy is concerned. More precisely, since 2002, the year that Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/AKP) took the power in Turkey, a new vision concerning the exercise of Turkey's foreign policy has been adopted. This policy is based on the notion of "strategic depth" developed by Ahmet Davutoglu<sup>2</sup>. According to Davutoglu, the emphasis accorded to the relation of Turkey with Western countries since the creation of the Turkish Republic has conducted to the neglect of Turkey's interests into other countries that belonged to the ancient Ottoman Empire and particularly with the countries of the North Africa and the Middle East (Taspinar, 2008).

According to Davutoglu, in the post-Cold war era, for a country to be a leading actor in international affairs, it must have "strategic depth". This "strategic depth" is consisted of a "geographical depth", which means an exceptional geopolitical location, and of a "historical depth", which means a rich cultural and historical background (Jabbour, 2015). For Davutoglu, Turkey, has both an exceptional geographical position, as it is geographically situated between the East and the West, and a rich cultural and historical legacy as heir to the Ottoman Empire (ibid.).

In consequence, Turkey, must be able to increase its influence to the territories that belonged to the Ottoman Empire in order to rise to the status of regional power. This conception of Turkey's foreign policy has also been qualified as neo-ottomanism. Therefore, for many specialists on the subject, Turkish soap-operas seem to be considered by the Turkish government as a tool in order to enhance a positive and attractive image for Turkey (particularly to the regions that belonged to the ancient Ottoman empire) and thus, augment its soft power.

Nilgün Tatal-Cheviron and Aydin Çam (2017), explain that many strategies of the Turkish government have been established in order to assist the production of Turkish soap operas. The public press agency (Anadolu Ajansi) and the financial

aid that is provided to private television channels and to production companies for the creation of soap operas are two of the instruments of this policy. Consequently, the diffusion of Turkish soap-operas outside Turkey's borders seems to contribute to the effort of turning Turkey into a "model country". Thereby, the representatives of Turkish government have several times stated in public the importance of Turkish soap operas for the government. For instance, Egemen Bagis, while he was the minister of the European Union Affairs (2009 – 2013) had declared: "Turkish series are a perfect tool for us to reflect Turkey's image and Turkish lifestyle. This, not only for our economic but also for our diplomatic and sociological interests. Turkish series have become one of the most effective means of our soft power" (Tutal-Cheviron and Çam, 2017: 133). The proliferation of soap-operas reviving Turkey's ottoman past (Muhteşem Yüzyıl, Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, Diriliş: Ertuğrul, Filinta etc.) as well as the emphasis accorded to Muslim principles and values (Paris, 2017), are two elements that point out the neo-ottomanist approach of Turkey's contemporary popular culture in general and of Turkish soap-operas in particular. Furthermore, the forced politicization of the celebrities starring in these soap-operas is another element that testifies the importance accorded to this sector by the Turkish government (Vitrinel, 2019).

Turkish soap-operas are now exported in more than 140 countries. One of the most popular soap operas is Muhteşem Yüzyıl (Magnificent century) that has been watched by almost 400 millions of viewers worldwide. The soap operas in question seem to have even overcome in popularity telenovelas in Latin America that since recently were "dominant" in this particular geographical area.

## Turkish Dramas in Greek Television

As mentioned in our introduction, among the countries that consume Turkish soap-operas, Greece keeps a high position. This consumption has particularly augmented since the economic crisis. Nonetheless, Turkish soap-operas had tempted long before the financial crisis to conquer the Greek media market. The first attempt was with the soap-opera entitled *Yabancı Damat* back in 2005<sup>3</sup>. This particular soap-opera narrates the love story between a Greek man and a Turkish woman. The soap-opera in question was well received by the Greek audience as it marked particularly satisfying audience rates<sup>4</sup>. At this point, it is worth mentioning, that the success of this first Turkish soap-opera in Greece, is based basically upon two major factors. First, this cultural product was diffused during a summertime. More often, during this period Greek channels suffer from a severe lack of fictions having as a result to diffuse again and again episodes from cult series such as *The*

Penthouse<sup>5</sup>, Those and the others<sup>6</sup> etc. Thus, this soap-opera was one of the few “new” products in the Greek market during that summer. Moreover, the storyline of this soap-opera seemed to interest particularly the Greek audience as, as mentioned above, it treats the “forbidden” love between a Greek man and a Turkish woman. Images of both Athens and Istanbul, funny stereotypes for both populations (especially their oldest generations representatives’ attitudes), common cultural traits and of course the archetype of Romeo and Juliet were some of the elements that drew the attention of the audience.

Despite the huge success of this first Turkish soap-opera in Greece, the Greek market seemed to be more resistant in adopting cultural products from the neighboring country. It is worth mentioning that at the same year (2005) another Turkish soap-opera made its appearance on the Greek screen, this time through the antenna of Alpha TV. This soap-opera was entitled *Asmali Konak*<sup>7</sup> and did not stimulate the interest of the Greek audience having as a result its interruption few months after its first diffusion.

It was five years later, in 2010, that the Greek market began to import systematically soap-operas from the neighboring country. More precisely, in June 2010, the soap-opera *Binbir Gece*<sup>8</sup> was the first big success that established the leading role of Turkish soap-operas in Greece. The serial in question that was diffused by Ant1 TV, marked very high audience rates and thus was the top program in the prime-time zone during several weeks competing other Greek products of the same genre that were particularly successful until this moment such as *The life of another*<sup>9</sup> or *Edem’s secrets*<sup>10</sup>. After this first successful attempt, the same channel also diffused in 2010 the soap-operas *Dudaktan Kalbe*<sup>11</sup> and *Gümüş*<sup>12</sup>. The following year, the two other leading Greek channels (Alpha TV and MEGA Channel) followed the example of Ant1 TV and began to diffuse systematically Turkish soap-operas. *Ezel* (Ant1 TV)<sup>13</sup>, *Ask-i memnu* (Ant1 TV)<sup>14</sup>, *Sıla* (MEGA channel)<sup>15</sup>, *Asi* (Ant1 TV)<sup>16</sup>, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (Ant1 TV)<sup>17</sup>, *Fatmagül’ün Suçu Ne?* (MEGA channel)<sup>18</sup>, *Karadayı* (Ant1 TV)<sup>19</sup>, *Anne* (Ant1 TV)<sup>20</sup>, *Kadin* (Ant1 TV)<sup>21</sup> etc. are some of the soap-operas diffused between 2011 and 2019 in Greece. At this point, we have to point out, that Greek fans of Turkish soap-operas do not only watch the products that are diffused in Greek channels but also many others through Internet (through live streaming directly from Turkish channels, through non legal sites etc.) and through DVDs. For all these reasons, it is particularly difficult to have the exact number of Turkish series that have been watched by the Greek audience. However, people who participated in our research have watched in total more than 50 Turkish soap-operas. Additionally, it is worth mentioning, that according to the AGB Nielsen Media Research<sup>22</sup>, for certain periods<sup>23</sup> Turkish soap operas figure on the list with the “top 5” of foreign programs in terms of audience rates.

## Questioning the Concept of Soft Power: An Empirical Approach

Nye's theory relies on a mechanical chain of action according to which, when a country adopts soft power tools it increases its attractiveness towards other countries and thus can automatically influence the second (Angey-Sentuc & Molho, 2015). Consequently, culture, is here perceived as a simple commodity and not as connected to human processes (Flew, 2016).

Therefore, it can be understood that soft power theory relies on the idea that audiences are passive and that they accept the messages encoded according to a certain ideology without questioning them and without negotiating the meanings they receive. Thus, soft power theory ignores the fundamental principle of Cultural Studies: the fact that media messages are decoded and that this process depends on various factors such as ideology (Hall, 1973) or other sociodemographic and cultural elements (Morley, 1980 ; Katz & Liebes, 1993). More precisely, as Rawnsley (2015) mentions "there is no guarantee that the audience for international programming will decode the meaning of messages in a way the source would prefer, since interpretation occurs according to the prevailing cultural, social and political beliefs, attitudes and norms among individual audience members" (as cited in Flew, 2016: 286).

In other terms, the ideological context in which a drama takes place does not imply the passivity of the audiences and thus their subordination to content producers. To be more accurate, dominant messages may be successfully encoded according to the ideology of those who produce them, but it is the audience that will decode these messages and thus has interpretative power over them (Flew, 2016).

Therefore, the use of the term soft power should not be used in order to indicate a process that conducts de facto to the attraction and thus the influence and the control of the audiences but rather as a communicational intentionality on behalf the content producers. More precisely, "the culture and values of a country may appeal to other nations but without them accepting the political leadership of this country and or aligning with its political and diplomatic positions" (Jabbour, 2015: 17). Pleasure from the viewing of these soap-operas may be due to the cultural proximity between the cultural context in which these series are produced and the cultural context in which they are received, to the particular context of economic crisis which is marked by a series of cultural reclassifications (Constantopoulou & Larochele, 2013), to the storylines, to the "eye candy" effect<sup>24</sup> (Marcucci, 2012) etc. However, this pleasure does not necessarily signify the abolition of historical and emotional differences between the neighboring populations nor Greeks' willing WILL to support of the actions of the Turkish government. Certainly, this attraction can have some direct effects as far as certain practices are concerned such as tourism and Turkish language learning or even the reconsideration of some

negative stereotypes Greeks may had for Turks but yet these elements do not necessarily imply the will of Greeks to follow the interests of the Turkish government as soft power theory suggests.

Furthermore, one particularity that turns the use of the term soft power less operational is the methodological difficulty to measure the consequences of the viewing of these soap-operas. Measuring the direct effects like practices such as tourism and language learning activities is relatively easy but measuring the eventual social or psychological effects (i.e. willingness to support the actions of the Turkish government, acceptance of Turkey's interests in some regions, complete abolition of certain negative representations that are due to historical or emotional elements etc.) is harder to measure.

As a result, the in-depth empirical study of the reception of such cultural goods is necessary in order to be able to examine the relation (if exists) between attraction and influence.

## Findings

### Audience's predisposition

Despite the fact that Turkish soap-operas marked significantly important audience rates in Greece, their introduction to the Greek market was also accompanied by numerous negative reactions from religious and political authorities, citizens as well as from the intelligentsia of the country. These reactions are due to the particular historical relations between the two countries. The Greek-Turkish antagonism is one of the few oldest enduring conflicts between neighbors worldwide and it is not only based on tangible and objective conflicts (minority issues, the Cyprus problem, interests over Aegean etc.) but also on emotional elements (Heraclides, 2011).

Historically, the encounters between the two neighboring countries could be classified in three different periods. The origin of this rivalry can be found in the Middle Ages, at the battle of Manzikert in 1071, between Byzantine "Greeks" and Seljuk "Turks". This first phase of encounters ends with the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed II the Conqueror (1453). The second period is from 1453 to 1821, which is portrayed by the Greeks as 400 years of "Turkish occupation" while the same period is considered by the Turks as a model of tolerance and multiculturalism, in which the Greeks flourished as no other non-Muslim community. Finally, the third phase of confrontation is the period from 1821 (the start of the Greek War of Independence) until today (ibid, 2011).

Consequently, when Turkish soap-operas started to “dominate” the Greek market several reactions occurred. More precisely, Mikis Theodorakis, one of the most important figures of the Greek cultural and political scene declared in 2012 that Turkish soap-operas are elements of anti-Greek propaganda and of cultural intrusion of the “enemy” in the country<sup>25</sup>. What seems to be worth of noticing is that the reaction of Mikis Theodorakis who is situated in left political spectrum was similar to the reaction of more conservative social groups. For instance, Bishop of Thessaloniki Anthimos, known for his conservative political beliefs, had also declared that Turkish soap-operas project an alienated and alienating version of history and of Turkish civilization and thus are dangerous<sup>26</sup>.

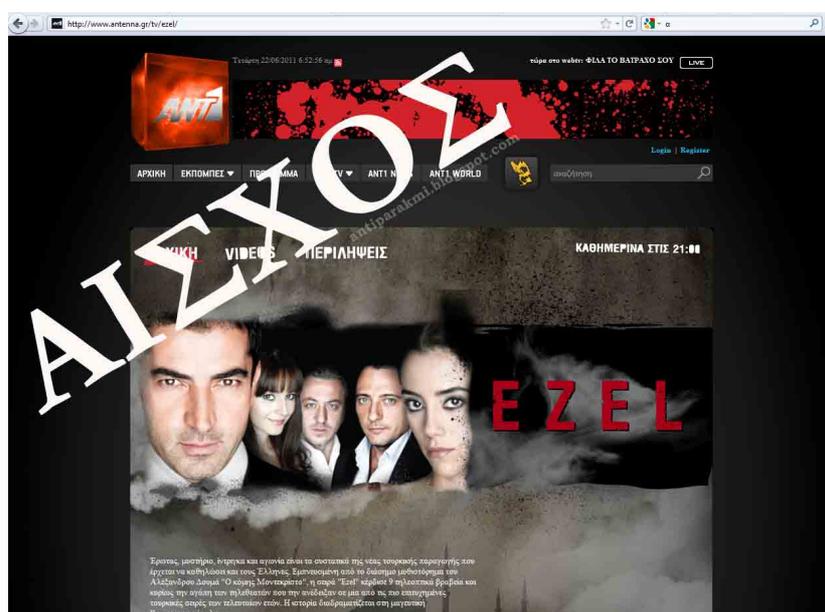


Figure 1: Image accompanying article that was inviting citizens to gather in front of the channel Ant1 TV in order to protest against the projection of the soap-opera Ezel. It is a picture of the channel’s website referring to the new soap-opera (Ezel) and on top of it the word “disgrace” was marked with capital letters in Greek<sup>27</sup>.

Moreover, on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 many citizens were gathered in front of the channel Ant1 in order to protest against the projection of the soap-opera Ezel which contained several scenes of the occupied part of Cyprus (Figures 1 and 2). The diffusion of such content was considered to be an act of national betrayal from a part of Greek and Cypriot citizens. Additionally, members of the Greek - Cypriot community, applied a charge in the court against the channel in question in order to stop the diffusion of this particular soap-opera<sup>28</sup>.



Figure 2: Picture of members of the Greek-Cypriot community protesting in front of the main building of Ant1 TV on June 22nd, 2011. They are holding a banner with the following inscription: "Greek-Turkish friendship is not possible as long as the occupation persists in Cyprus"<sup>29</sup>.

Thus, it can be understood that apart from the important audience rates, several negative reactions occurred not only when Turkish soap-operas began to be systematically projected on Greek television but also until recently. These reactions are due to the particular historical and emotional differences that characterize the relations between the two countries and cannot seem to be overcome despite the availability of Turkish cultural products on the Greek market. Consequently, the soft power theory is first of all limited by the predisposition of the audiences towards a particular country's cultural productions. Our empirical research revealed that the fans of the particular cultural products are very sensitive on nationalist propaganda. More precisely, 46 out of 50 individuals recognized in these soap-operas an intention to promote Turkey's image and thus enhance a positive image of the country abroad. Furthermore, in some cases (12 out of 50) they even recognized as a kind of anti-Greek propaganda which conducted them to the immediate reject of certain soap-operas with historical content (i.e. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, *Vatanım Sensin* etc.). However, in some cases the viewing of Turkish soap-operas conducted individuals to reconsider certain negative stereotypes that they may had for Turks. More precisely, through Turkish soap-operas are portrayed values, habits and elements that are common to the two countries and that do not characterize westernized cultural products (i.e. the respect of the institution of the family, common foods, common prejudices etc.).

Thus, Greeks seem to identify their everyday life habits more easily to the narratives of Turkish series. This identification of individuals to the characters, to the situations and to the social environments represented in Turkish soaps enhance their emotional attachment to the storylines. Furthermore, Turkish soap-operas do not surprise them as they are capable of understanding the interpretations, the intentions, the attitudes, the roles and the social and cultural situations they watch and that they consider as being part of their own lives. This identification with the audiovisual contents dedicated to everyday life and culture creates a sense of proximity to the audiences which not only intensifies their interest for the program but also their emotional implication to them.

Thus, through the consumption of these soap-operas Greek audiences have the possibility to re-examine the representation they have for the Turks and are invited to discover not only the cultural differences but also the common traits between the two populations.

“They are not that much different after all... They have the same habits, the same values... I like that, I believe it’s closer to us than Americans”

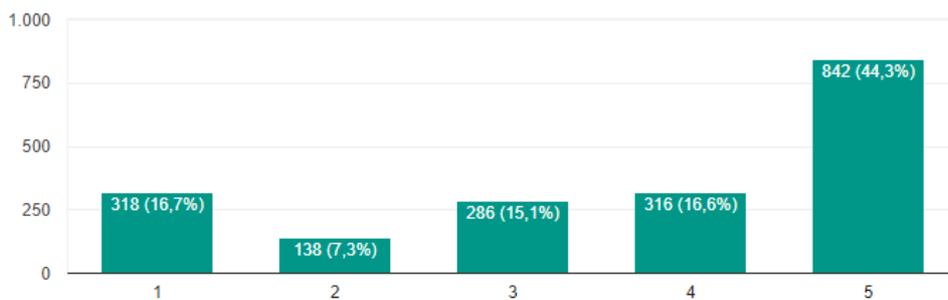
(Eirini, 36 years old)

Despite these alternative representations offered to the Greek audience through Turkish soap-operas, we cannot argue that this attraction due to the cultural proximity between the two countries can be translated to a certain willingness of Greeks to support Turkey’s interests, to overcome long-enduring rivalries or to even follow the Turkish government’s decisions if necessary as soft power theory suggests. Moreover, the majority of the interviewees are aware of the political and social context in which these soap-operas are produced. Thus, they are very critical towards the representations projected through these products and the image of Turkey that they tempt to project. Thus, they are very cautious as far as the content of the series they chose is concerned. Consequently, they often reject products that contradict their own knowledge of history or of social reality. Within this context it is obvious that the viewing of a country’s cultural goods may not necessarily be translated to diplomatic outcomes.

## Fan's Practices as Proves of Soft Power?

The viewing of Turkish soap-operas seems to conduct to certain “tangible” effects such as tourism activities and Turkish language learning practices. More precisely, among the 1900 individuals (majorly women) who replied to our online survey the 38,2% (726 individuals) have visited at least once Istanbul. Among 1176 persons who haven't yet visited Istanbul, the 97% (1139 individuals) want to visit the town while only 3% (37 individuals) don't have the intention to do so.

We've asked from subjects who participated in our research to evaluate from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) to which level Turkish soap operas stimulated them to visit Istanbul or to desire to visit Istanbul.



Question: From 5 (very much) to 1 (not at all) to which extent Turkish soap operas stimulated you to visit (or to intent to visit) Istanbul?

As it can be observed from the graphic above, an important part of individuals replied that their will to visit the town of Istanbul was influenced to an important extent by Turkish soap operas.

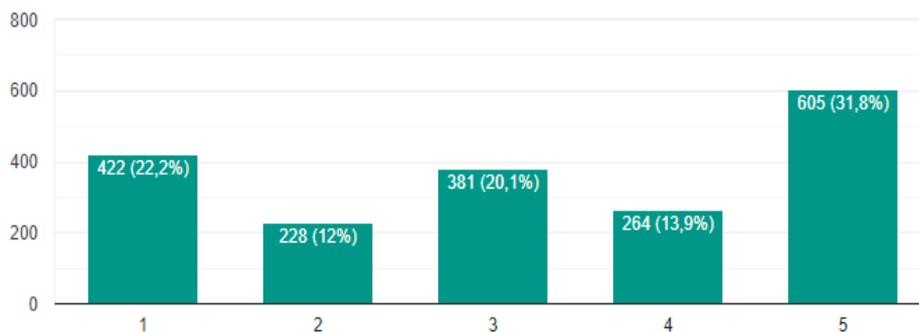
On this point, we have to highlight that among the people who have already visited Istanbul, the 25% of them (182 individuals) had combined their visit to an activity strictly related to Turkish soap operas (i.e. meeting with a protagonist, visit locations or villas that have been used as scenery for the filming of soap operas, assist to the shootings, visit studios or even neighborhoods that are portrayed in their favorite series etc.).

Many researchers have worked on the relation between media products and tourism activities. Sue Beeton (2005) analyzed the relation between tourism and films. As she explained, travelling in order to visit the places that were used as sites for the making of a film or of a TV program or conducting other types of activities that are directly related to the making of a media product (e.g. tours to production studios, theme parks etc.) is what she qualified as “film-induced tourism”.

Of course, we have to point out that visiting Istanbul is easy for Greeks as it is near and thus, transportation costs are relatively affordable. Additionally, accommodation costs are not expensive. Thus, conducting tourism activities in relation with Turkish soap operas is not as hard as it could be for telenovelas for example where travelling to Argentina or Mexico could be more complicated. We consider that this is a factor that should be also taken under consideration.

Yet again, soap-opera induced tourism is relevant to the attraction of the audience by these particular cultural goods but cannot be translated to diplomatic outcomes. One characteristic example of this is that when in 2018 a diplomatic difference between Greece and Turkey occurred, several social groups in Greece invited citizens to boycott Turkish soap-operas<sup>30</sup> and tourism activities in Turkey<sup>31</sup> which resulted indeed to the decrease to Greek tourists in Turkey<sup>32</sup>. Thus, it can be understood that the attraction by certain cultural goods or even the tourist activities in the locations portrayed through them cannot be translated to diplomatic outcomes. Audience's predisposition or current diplomatic relations and collective memory seem to play a more important role. In other terms, soft power theory, does not take under consideration the complexity of relationship between two countries which may be shaped by different historical, geopolitical and strategic elements in which soft power may play only a limited role (Fan, 2008).

Furthermore, among the 1900 persons that participated in our research the 21,6% (411 persons) declared speaking Turkish. When we've asked them to evaluate from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) to which level Turkish soap operas stimulated them to learn Turkish or to desire to learn Turkish in the future an important percentage declared that they were highly stimulated by their viewing experience.



Question: From 5 (very much) to 1 (not at all) to which extent Turkish soap operas stimulated you to learn Turkish (or to intent to do so)?

As you can see from the above graphic an important percentage of the interviewees are interested in Turkish language because of their viewing experience. However, an important aspect that has to be taken under consideration is that among the 1900 persons who participated in our research 34,9 % (664 persons) are originated from areas that now belong to Turkey. Consequently, Turkish words or idioms are part of the dialect of their ancestors. During our interviews an important percentage of our interviewees (19 out of 50) declared that they enjoy watching Turkish soap-operas as they like hearing common words or words that their ancestors were using. Thus, Turkish soap-operas may be a stimulus concerning their will to learn Turkish language but yet their motivations may be related to their family background.

“I like hearing Turkish language. My father was originated from Asia Minor. He was speaking the Turkish language and I really like to hear this language now. It reminds me him”.

(Argyro, 51 years old)

Consequently, neither the learning of Turkish language could be considered as a direct influence of Turkish soap-operas on the Greek audiences. However, Turkish soap-operas could be considered as stimuli for the rediscovery of Turkish civilization by the Greeks. Nonetheless, we still cannot argue that this rediscovery conducts to diplomatic outcomes or to the abolition of negative feelings towards Turks. Greek-Turkish relations are long-enduring, troubled and very fragile as they are due not only on tangible but also on emotional elements. Thus, it would be naïf to conclude that as Greeks are attracted by Turkish soap-operas, they would be more willing to overcome historical and geopolitical differences and negative feelings and follow / support Turkish government's interests as soft power theory suggests.

## Conclusion

Since the introduction of soft power theory by Joseph Nye, many political and media scientists as well as elite journalists have used this concept in order to analyze the impact of transnational media texts and their effects on local audiences. Despite its popularity, the theory in question raises several questions that should be taken under consideration. First, it presupposes a direct link between attractiveness and the ability to influence other nations in a diplomatic level. Second, it underestimates the complexity of the reception process of media texts by the audiences. More precisely, there no guarantee that transnational audiences will decode the meaning of messages in a way the source would prefer because interpretation occurs according to the different cultural, social, political beliefs and attitudes that are dominant in each society. Finally, it does not take under consideration the complexity of the relationship between two countries which may be defined by historic and strategic elements and in which soft power may play only a limited role.

Undeniably, Turkish soap-operas attract Greek audiences for several reasons such as cultural proximity, identity negotiation, alternative storylines etc. and which may conduct activities in relation to these particular soap-operas (i.e. soap-opera induced tourism) or to Turkish civilization in general (i.e. learning Turkish language). However, this attraction should not be confounded with the desire to overcome long-enduring rivalries and negative feelings in order to follow Turkish government's interests. Therefore, the attraction of local audiences by transnational texts such as Turkish soap-operas, should not be considered as a de facto success of Turkey's soft power. Soft power should be used as a communicational intentionality rather than an effect.

## Author Biography

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## Notes

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1. See more: <http://litsonline-ebrd.com/the-crisis-impact-in-greece/>
  2. Former academic and diplomat. Minister of Turkey's Foreign Affairs (2009 – 2014) and Turkey's Prime-Minister (2014 – 2016).
  3. This soap-opera was running in Turkey from 2004 to 2007. In Greece, it was projected by MEGA Channel.
  4. From the first to the last episode this soap-opera marked more than 30% of the television rate while the episode projected on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2005 marked a rate of 58,4%. Source: AGB Hellas ([www.arianna.gr](http://www.arianna.gr)).
  5. 1990 – 1992 (MEGA channel)
  6. 1993 – 1996 (Ant1 TV)
  7. 2002 – 2003 (in Turkey).
  8. 2006 – 2009 (in Turkey).
  9. 2009 – 2012 (MEGA channel).
  10. 2008 – 2011 (MEGA channel).
  11. 2007 – 2009 (in Turkey) / 2010 – 2011 (in Greece).
  12. 2005 – 2007 (in Turkey) / 2010 – 2011 (in Greece).
  13. 2009 – 2011 (in Turkey) / 2011 – 2012 (in Greece).
  14. Ask-i-memnu, 2008 – 2010 (in Turkey) / 2011 – 2012 (in Greece).
  15. 2006 – 2008 (in Turkey) / 2012 – 2013 (in Greece).
  16. 2007 – 2009 (in Turkey) / 2012 – 2013 (in Greece).
  17. Muhtesem Yuzyil, 2011 – 2014 (in Turkey) / 2012 – 2013.
  18. Fatmagul'un sucu ne?, 2010 – 2012 (in Turkey) / 2012 – 2014.
  19. 2012 – 2015 (in Turkey), 2013 – 2014.
  20. 2016 – 2017 (in Turkey) / 2017 – 2018 (in Greece).
  21. 2017 – 2019 (in Turkey) / 2018 – 2019 (in Greece).
  22. Audience measurement company which is active in Greece since 1988.
  23. Particularly between 2011 and 2013.
  24. The beauty of the protagonists
  25. Newpost, "Mikis against Turkish serials: The enemy is in front of the gates if not already in" Published on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Consulted on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (<http://newpost.gr/parapolitika/152119/mikis-kata-toyrkikon-sirial-o-exthros-einai-pro-ton-ylon-anden-mpike-idi-mesa>)
  26. Euro2day, "Anthimos on Turkish soap-operas". Published on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Consulted on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (<https://www.euro2day.gr/news/highlights/article-news/726566/o-anthimos-gia-ta-toyrkika-sirial.html>).
  27. Source: Olympia.gr. "The new Turkish serial of Ant1 is taking place on the bleeding soils of the occupied Cyprus". Published on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. Consulted on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (<https://olympia.gr/2011/06/22/%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CF%89%CE%BC%CE%B5%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%87%CF%89%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%BA%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B5%CF%87%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%B5%CE%BD%CE%B7%CF%83-%CE%BA/>)
  28. Newsbeast.gr. "Charge against Ant1 for Ezel". Published on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Consulted on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (<https://www.newsbeast.gr/media/arthro/201340/minusi-kata-tou-ad1-gia-to-ezel>).
  29. Lifo.gr. "Cypriots protested outside Ant1 for Ezel". Published on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Consulted on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (<https://www.lifo.gr/now/politics/3673>).
  30. Organiclife.gr. "Boycottage of Turkish TV productions as long as Turkey provokes". Published on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Consulted on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (<https://www.organiclife.gr/el/hot-news/5571-boikotaz-sts-tourkikes-paragoges-oso-i-tourkia-apeilei.html>).
  31. Militaire.gr. "Boycottage of Tourism in Turkey now!". Published on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018. Consulted on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (<https://www.militaire.gr/mpoikotaz-ston-toyrkiko-toyrismo-tora-echei-idi-xekinisei-as-to-voithisoyme/>).
  32. Newsit.gr. "Greeks boycott tourism in Turkey". Published on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018. Consulted on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (<https://www.newsit.gr/kosmos/mpoikotaz-ton-ellinon-touriston-stin-tourkia-meta-ti-syllipsi-ton-dyo-stratitikon/2452583/>).

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