



"Mine Vaganti"

age those funds for maximum impact.

For example, they cap backing for a single feature-length film or television project at €150,000 (\$210,000), and at least 150% of the amount awarded must be spent during shooting in Apulia. The fund's organizers require that at least two weeks of filming must take place in Apulia, and that at least 30% of the staff used for the local shooting be local. But they also provide an array of in-kind support options not included in the €150,000-cap, including discounted hotel rooms and meals, experienced location scouts, and access to the region's two "Cineporto" facilities more on that later.

Iarussi boasts about the nimbleness of the commission's decision-making process, which he says has no political agenda. And decisions come fast: Requests for access to the region's many cultural sites are fast-tracked, and applications for funding are processed within 60 days of the region's three annual deadlines at the end of January, May, and October.

"We think it all adds up to making Apulia a very attractive location for making films," Iarussi says.

The two Cineporto facilities are the crown jewels of the region's cinema sector. As with the film fund, they were developed on a modest budget spent well. The 1,200-square-meter (13,000 square feet) facility in the city of Bari opened Jan. 16, with the 600-square-meter (6,500 square feet) Lecce facility slated to open in late February. They were built with a combined €800,000 (\$1.1 million) in regional funding, plus another €350,000 (\$490,000) from other sources.

Once the location in Lecce opens it will make Apulia the only region in Italy with more than one Cineporto-type facility.

The Cineportos in Bari and Lecce are designed to serve a variety of purposes, ranging from high-definition film screenings, to help with makeup and costumes, to casting studios, to production offices, plus exhibition areas and a coffee bar and restaurant. Those working on films in the region have free access to the facilities.

"These facilities are really a strong part of Apulia's cinema heritage," says Silvio Maselli, the film commission director and one of the supervisors of the Cineporto projects. "The region has a young and creative population, and a these facilities can be a focal point for them as well as a new reason for filmmakers to be drawn to the region."

Maselli adds that the region opted to create two Cineportos rather than to consoli-

date their efforts and resources into one because of geography. Apulia is Italy's longest region from top to bottom, and between Bari and Lecce the facilities cover two of the most significant and picturesque cities in the region that are separated by nearly 100 miles of roads.

"Some people will use one facility or other, and some will use both, depending on the project," Maselli says. "Both parts of the region have their own particular strengths."

Using funds from the European Union budget for underdeveloped parts of the nation bloc, Apulia is helping to fund an initiative at 20 local cinemas in the region around a tenth of the region's total and is committed to smaller cinemas with no more than four screens. The idea is to make high-quality films accessible and available to a curious public in Apulia.

Those factors, combined with its natural and historical attractions, mean Apulia certainly seems to have attracted more than its share of fans. Recent projects shot in the region include Ferzan Ozpetek's "Mine Vaganti" (Loose Cannons), Davide Ba and Lorenzo Conte's "Fine pena mai" and Nico Cirasola's "Focaccia Blues."

"I first came to Apulia nine years ago and fell in love with it as a location," says Ozpetek, who is finishing his latest project "Mine Vaganti," which was shot entirely in Apulia. The film will screen in Berlin.

"Ever since I came to Apulia I thought that the next time I make a film with the right kind of atmosphere, the beach, and so on, that I would make it in Apulia. The commission has done everything it can to make the project a success." □



"Focaccia Blues"