

The dossier: film festivals

Dosya Editöründen | From the Dossier Editor

Hakan Erkilic'in¹ Sunuşu | *Dossier Editor's Preface*

The articles included in *Sinecine's* dossier on film festivals are academic papers derived from the proceedings of the 4th Film Festivals Symposium. We launched the fourth edition of the Film Festivals Symposium as part of the TÜBİTAK 1001 project no. 121K234, titled *Film Festivals in Turkey: Structure, Economy, Organization and Audience Profile (Case Study of the Film Festivals of Antalya, Adana, Istanbul, and Ankara)*², and continued its organization after the completion of the project. The 4th Film Festivals Symposium was held on May 25–26, 2025, within the framework of the 22nd Eskişehir International Film Festival. Organized by the Department of Cinema and Television at Anadolu University's Faculty of Communication Sciences, the festival stands out from other film festivals in Turkey as it is organized by a film school. As the symposium organizing committee, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Anadolu University Rector Prof. Dr. Yusuf Adıgüzel, Acting Dean of the Faculty of Communication Sciences Prof. Dr. Barış Kılınç, and Eskişehir Film Festival Director Prof. Dr. Serhat Serter, who was also a member of our project team, for their continued support and interest. We are pleased to note that the Film Festivals Symposium has served as a significant catalyst for film festival studies in Türkiye and has helped foster a small network among film festival professionals. During the course of the project and symposium, the number of young scholars conducting master's and doctoral research on film festivals increased notably. This demonstrates our contribution to establishing film festival studies as an academic field in Türkiye, which is a source of great satisfaction for us. Finally, I would like to thank all our colleagues for their participation and valuable contributions to the symposium.

Film festivals possess a distinctive atmosphere, magic, and energy;

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² We worked on this three-year project as a large team: Assoc. Prof. Hakan Erkilic (coordinator); Prof. Senem A. Duruel Erkilic; Prof. Dr. Emine Uçar İlbuğa; Prof. Dr. Ali Karadoğan; Assoc. Prof. Dr. S. Serhat Serter (now Professor); Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aydın Çam (researchers); and a dedicated group of scholarship holders who continuously supported the project: Selver Dikkol Akçay (now Dr., academic), Servet Can Dönmez (now Dr., academic), Onur Aytaç (now Dr.), Nil Yüce (now Dr.), Yunus Erdoğan, Merve Alagöz, and BİÇABA scholarship holders Erkan Akdere and Yunus Emre.

an ambiance that envelops the audience. As viewers hurry from one film to another, or from one theater to the next, they may catch sight of a familiar or famous face from previous years' festivals. Watching a film together with them in a darkened theater creates a unique feeling. For audiences, the atmosphere differs greatly from that of films watched outside the festival period; it offers an experience unlike any other. For filmmakers as well, film festivals provide a unique kind of experience: they are spaces where films are screened, where artists meet their audiences, interact with colleagues, discuss the challenges of the industry, and develop new ideas and projects. Film festivals also serve as a crucial hub for the economy, funding, and distribution of arthouse productions, fulfilling multiple functions as cultural gatekeepers and media events³. When discussing film festivals, de Valck (2016, p. 9) asks, "why do they matter?". She provides three key answers: wonderful films, the festival environment, and the opportunity to share the experience with others. She refers to these as the three "F"s: films, festivals, and friends. She then adds fund as the fourth "F". In a sense, the four "F"s (films, festivals, friends, and fund) described by de Valck (2016; 2020) as key components of festivals also apply to those held in Türkiye. The support and pitching programs offered under the names of forums and labs serve not only as sources of funding but also as vital networking spaces, particularly helping emerging young directors establish connections within the industry⁴. Film festivals are expected to support "new" cinema, arthouse productions, and young, independent directors and producers. However, I would like to share some of my initial impressions of the films I watched in the national competition sections of recent festivals. For whom are the films that rely on the prestige economy of international festivals and transnational funds, and that aim for transnational cinema, actually being made? My impression is that these films are neither intended for domestic audiences nor truly for international ones. More precisely, they seem unconcerned with audiences at all; rather, they are made primarily for international A-list festivals. Examples of transnational cinema within arthouse film are increasing every day, and it is clear that many directors are searching for new approaches. Therefore, we need to develop new perspectives on the economics of arthouse cinema, the festival–fund cycle, and the notion of the "festival film."⁵ Another observation concerns the impact of current

³ For discussions on the role of festivals for directors making their first film, see Ercan (2024).

⁴ For analyses of the effects of support and pitching programs on the film industry, see Çakır (2024).

⁵ For discussions on the concept of the "festival film," see Vitrinel (2023).

politics on film festivals. For festival directors, organizing festivals amid today's political climate, with its constraints shaped by censorship and self-censorship, has become an almost miraculous achievement in recent years. Despite these challenges, festivals must be freed from the determining influence and dominance of current politics, and they must not be criminalized. In this regard, responsibility lies as much with central authorities as it does with festival directors.

The dossier includes four articles, two reports (one symposium review and one film festival review), and three book reviews focusing on film festivals.

Our first article is by Marijke de Valck, the invited keynote speaker of the symposiums and guest author of this dossier: "The Educational Turn in Film Festivals." Before introducing her article, I would like to highlight a few points. Marijke de Valck, a scholar at Utrecht University, serves as a "north star" for those studying film festivals and for the field of film festival studies in general. Like the north star, always visible in the sky and guiding one's sense of direction, Marijke de Valck provides direction and inspiration for scholars in this field. The qualities symbolized by the north star (direction, guidance, light, endurance, and harmony) are all reflected in her contributions to film festival studies. Marijke de Valck is among the most significant figures who have contributed to the institutionalization of film festival studies as an academic field. Together with Skadi Loist, she founded the Film Festival Research Network (FFRN) in 2008. The FFRN features sources and information about bibliographies, symposiums, panels, and working groups related to film festivals on its website (<http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/>), which serves as an essential resource for scholars working in this area. Additionally, Marijke de Valck is the co-founder of the NECS Film Festival Research working group, the editor of the film festival review section of NECSUS journal, and the co-editor of the "Framing Film Festivals" book series published by Palgrave Macmillan. I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to Marijke de Valck, who has shown unwavering interest and support since the moment we first contacted her regarding the project. She has not only contributed to our symposiums as a keynote speaker but has also been closely involved in the project's development. Moreover, she has honored us by contributing as a guest author to *Sinecine's* dossier on film festivals. In her article, de Valck focuses on an understudied aspect of film festivals: their "educational turn." She examines film festivals as dynamic learning environments that bridge theory and practice, facilitate vocational training, engage young audiences, and argues that they can play a vital role

in shaping the next generation of filmgoers and critical thinkers. Within the framework of EU policy on media literacy, de Valck explores whether film festivals are undergoing an educational transformation and asks, "If so, what factors might explain the timing of this development?". She suggests that film festivals contribute to a developing professional media literacy practice that shapes young people critically, creatively, and culturally. Within this framework, it is important to highlight that the Istanbul Film Festival and the Ankara Film Festival play a significant role in cultivating audiences in Türkiye. It is also worth emphasizing that the Istanbul Film Festival functions as a kind of film school, training the directors associated with what has been described as post-1995 New Turkish Cinema. Furthermore, the Adana Golden Boll Film Festival includes a special screening program for children. In this context, further research is needed to evaluate children's and youth-oriented film festivals such as the Adana Golden Boll Film Festival's Boll Film Academy (which offers workshops and masterclasses for cinema students), the Ayvalık Film Festival's Young Cinema Meetings, the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival's Golden Orange Film School (which has not been held for the past two years), the TÜRSAK Children's Film Festival (TÜRSAK Çocuk Filmleri Festivali), the Children from My Lens International Short Film Festival (Kadrajımdan Çocuk Uluslararası Kısa Film Festivali), the International Children's Land Film Festival for Children and Youth (Uluslararası Çocuk Diyarı Çocuk ve Gençlik Filmleri Festivali), and the Garanti Mini Bank International Children's Film Festival (Garanti Mini Bank Uluslararası Çocuk Filmleri Festivali).

Drawing on the project's findings, Aydın Çam, a member of the Film Festivals in Turkey project team, and Çiğdem Aksu Çam present a historical analysis of the first period of the Adana Golden Boll Film Festival (1969–1973) in their article "Reproducing Implicit Elitism: Organisational Transformation and Public Exclusion during the Golden Boll (Altın Koza) Film Festival's First Era (1969–1973)", using Bourdieu's concept of "implicit elitism." Examining this period primarily through the archives of Yeni Adana newspaper, the authors observe that, despite the claims and efforts of the time to integrate with the public, the festival bore clear traces of implicit elitism. The argument that film festivals should reach a broader public is open to debate in various contexts, and they initiate this discussion through their analysis of the festival's first era. It is also worth noting that the Adana Golden Boll Film Festival has offered its film screenings and other events free of charge since its inception and currently extends its reach to disadvantaged neighborhoods through

open-air cinema screenings. One point deserves particular emphasis regarding the first period of the Adana Golden Boll Film Festival. As stated in the project findings, we believe that the festival's first era, organized through the collaboration of the Adana Municipality, the Adana Cinema Club, and the Turkish Film Archive, represents a significant model. In this structure, the Adana Municipality was responsible for the festival's financial operations, the Adana Cinema Club for audience engagement and city participation, and the Turkish Film Archive for programming, regulations, jury coordination, competition management, and industry guest participation. This initiative, regarded as a strong and distinctive example of festival organization in Türkiye, encompassing collaboration among public institutions, civil society, and academia, unfortunately had to be discontinued after a short period due to conflicts arising from differing inter-agency approaches.

In their article "Beyond the Festival: The Istanbul Film Festival and the Audience of Kadıköy Cinema," which includes findings from the TÜBİTAK project, Melis Behlil and Sena Öndün Sivas, both of whom have made significant contributions to the Film Festivals Symposium, examine arthouse audiences and their film festival experiences. Their study focuses on Kadıköy Cinema, a venue that emphasizes arthouse films in its screening program. Drawing on the framework of New Cinema History and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital, the authors explore how audiences engage with film culture in this context. The article presents field findings based on surveys and in-depth interviews. It reveals that the audience is predominantly young and highly educated, reflecting new middle-class cultural trends. Notably, 80% of the participants are also festival audiences. This result, consistent with the findings of the Film Festivals in Turkey project, suggests that arthouse film audiences largely overlap with film festival audiences. In relation to this article, and to a forthcoming study, I would like to highlight the difference between the French, English, and Turkish meanings of the word "*cinophile*," a distinction also identified in the findings of the Film Festivals in Turkey project. Although the terms *cinéphilie* (French), *cinophilia/film lovers* (English), and *sinemasever* (Turkish) share the same general meaning, there are subtle but important differences between them. In Turkish, *sinefil* is used as the equivalent of *cinéphilie* or *cinophile/film lover*. However, *sinemasever* has a broader meaning than *sinefil*. According to the project's findings, only 30% of festival audiences define themselves as *sinefil*. The majority identify as *sinemasever*. Yet, this self-definition does not fully align with the classical understanding of *sinefil* (*cinéphilie*, film lover). Many audience

members state, "I am not a *sinefil*," even though they describe themselves as *sinemasever*. These individuals, who define themselves as "*sinefil olmayan sinemasever*" ("film lovers who are not *cinephiles*"), tend to form a more emotional connection with cinema. However, they should not be regarded as "fans" either. Chinita (2016) distinguishes between *cinophile* and fan through the lens of high and low culture. While the *cinophile* is associated with high culture, the fan belongs to the realm of low culture, typically characterized by watching popular films within the same cinematic universe. Yet, it would be inaccurate to claim that film festival audiences who describe themselves as "film lovers" only watch popular films within such a narrow framework. Popular films are generally excluded from festival programs, which instead feature national arthouse productions, international arthouse films, world cinema, documentaries, and short films. It is also important to distinguish "film lovers" from another segment of festival attendees who may simply be spending their leisure time or attending as "event-goers." Unlike *cinephiles*, this group consists of diverse audience types, each with its own characteristics, forming what Odabaşı (2018) describes as a "flexible, performative category of audience membership."⁶ Further research on both *cinephiles* and other audience groups is needed to examine them independently. Behlil and Öndün Sivas make a valuable contribution in this regard by positioning arthouse audiences as *cinephiles* within the broader film festival audience.

In his article "Framing Buzz: Film Festivals as Affective Atmospheres," Murad Özdemir offers a theoretical discussion of the concept of "buzz" within the context of film festivals from an interdisciplinary perspective. He focuses on urban affect, atmospheric attunement, and the anthropological concept of transduction. Özdemir positions festival buzz as a living substance, an atmospheric force that shapes the festival landscape. In Türkiye, buzz, often understood in relation to gossip and tabloid journalism, is particularly prevalent during "festival time," especially concerning the selection of films for competition and the jury's decisions. For a period, especially before 2000, certain festivals became strongly associated with buzz; the festival itself turned into a phenomenon marked by crisis and controversy. The tabloid pages of newspapers and popular weekly or monthly magazines of the time (such as *Ses*, *Ha-*

⁶ De Valck (2005), based on her fieldwork at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, categorizes *cinephiles* as the lone list-maker, the highlight seeker, the specialist (often professional), the leisure visitor, the social tourist, and the volunteer.

yat, and Hey) frequently featured stories of festival "buzz." Reading festivals through the lens of festival buzz offers an alternative perspective on their social and cultural dimensions.

The first article in the report section of the film festival dossier takes the form of a cinephile's diary. Vahit Tansoy is a cinephile who lives in Antalya and loyal follower of İstanbul Film festival. For this specialty, he was awarded with a Lifetime Ticket for İstanbul Film Festival in 2007. Vahit Tansoy provides a concise evaluation of the 22nd edition of the Eskişehir Film Festival. The second article is a symposium review, written by Sena Öndün Sivas, which offers a comprehensive overview of the 4th Film Festivals Symposium and discusses the papers presented there. We are pleased to announce that Film Festivals Book 4 (Film Festivalleri Kitabı 4), another publication selected from the symposium proceedings, will be released as an e-book in October.⁷ The book review section of this dossier features reviews of three books on film festivals. Neşe Öztemir Hazan reviewed "Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era and After," a volume discussing film festivals during the pandemic, co-edited by Marijke de Valck and Antoine Damiens, published in 2023 and available as an e-book. Erhan Türküm reviewed "Shaping Film Festivals in a Changing World: Practice and Methods," co-edited by Tamara Falicov and Dorota Ostrowska, published as an e-book in 2025. Finally, Onur Aytaç reviewed "Değişen Sinema Değişen Seyirci Film Festivalleri ve Alternatif Arayışlar" (Changing Cinema, Shifting Audience: Film Festivals and Alternative Quests), compiled by Önder Özdemir from Türkiye, a work that focuses on changing cinematic practices, audiences, and the Labor Film Festival.

I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues from project no. 121K234, titled Film Festivals in Turkey: Structure, Economy, Organization and Audience Profile (Case Study of the Film Festivals of Antalya, Adana, İstanbul, and Ankara); to the Eskişehir Film Festival team; to all our contributors; and to the referees who submitted their evaluations promptly despite the summer heat. I would also like to thank the members of the editorial board of *Sinecine* Journal for their contributions to this issue and Buğra Kibaroğlu for the design. Selver Dikkol Akçay served as assistant editor of the issue, and I am especially grateful for her meticulous and careful work both during and after the project.

The theme of *Sinecine*'s upcoming special issue will be "audience."

⁷ The Film Festivals Book I, II, and III (Film Festivalleri Kitabı I, II, and III) e-books are available at: <https://www.screenfest.org/yayinlar-publications/>

The editors for this issue will be Hasan Akbulut and Aydın Çam. We eagerly look forward to your submissions.

Enjoy reading, and happy festivals.

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