

## **Old places, renewed experiences: Looking at the legacy of Çukurova cinemas in the pandemic era**

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### **Abstract:**

The long history of cinemas in the Turkish city of Adana is rich with reports of open-air venues, which were especially popular in the 1960s and 1970s. In this article, based on archival materials collected from a local newspaper and participatory observation during the summers of 2019- 2021, we aim to discuss how the cinemagoing experience has been revitalised and why it can promote community-building by scrutinizing its historical legacy. We observed open-air screenings during the last three summers and try to understand how the cinema-going experience has regenerated. We discuss whether these experiences might be a mode of regeneration to transfer the memories of earlier cinema-going activities, which can be accepted as intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, as the COVID-19 pandemic brings a new dimension to this process, the issue of using public spaces has come to the fore. Again, in Adana, with the initiative of the municipalities, cinema activities were organised for the first time in the form of drive-in and 'float-in' cinemas, 'screening on the gondolas'. Members of local communities have attended these activities in great numbers, and cinema-going has become a vital social experience, especially during the pandemic. Therefore, in this article, we also argue that cinema as a heterotopia can become a new space for socialisation, just like it was in the past.

**Keywords:** Open-air cinemas, heterotopic space, float-in cinema, drive-in cinema, historical cinemagoing

### **Introduction**

The Çukurova region, located in the southern foothills of the Taurus mountains, which run parallel along the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, has witnessed cinema activities in various forms such as travelling cinema, open-air cinema, cinema halls in ambulant

screenings or fixed places within both rural and urban spatial contexts for about 120 years. Historically, the region was home to cotton plantations which used to provide the raw materials needed by the UK and continental Europe due to the shortages resulting from the US Civil War. Thus, the economic and social activities organised around cotton production made Çukurova one of the first industrialised regions in both the Ottoman era and newly-built Turkey. The larger settlement of Çukurova includes cities and towns such as Mersin, Tarsus, Adana, Osmaniye, İskenderun, and partly Hatay. Although populations are relatively low in number, these provinces are highly cosmopolitan areas where different ethnic and religious communities live.

In the heart of the region, the city of Adana has been home to more than 110 commercial cinema venues since the oldest screening we can document, which was held in 1902 (Çam, 2018). Especially during the 'Golden Era' of the Turkish cinema industry between 1960 and 1980, Adana also served as one of the six centres for the 'Regional Management Model' of the industry (Erkiliç and Ünal, 2018), which means that the city was not only the centre of the distribution network of the region, but also one of the most prominent financiers of the whole national film production by upfront purchase. Therefore, in our oral history studies (Çam and Şanlıer Yüksel, 2020), we listened to reports of an extraordinary variety of cinema activities in the entire Çukurova region. Besides, due to the climate, one of the significant indicators of the Çukurova cinemagoing experience was the activities held in open-air and terrace cinemas during hot summers. Between 1960 and 1980, more than 110 cinema venues in the city centre were places for exhibition and spaces where people interacted with each other for various reasons. By the mid-1970s, as the cinema industry withered away due to the economic and political turmoil in Turkey at the time, cinema venues in Adana closed their doors one by one.

However, as observed in the past three years, especially during the summer season, pop-up non-commercial film screenings were being held in open spaces and in transient forms mainly via the initiative of local authorities in Adana and the Çukurova region. We aim to discuss why open-air cinemas as a long-faded space have been regenerated and how they were experienced, just before and during the pandemic. We will lay our arguments by utilizing the Foucauldian conceptual framework of 'heterotopic space' and through data collected during participant observation during the summers of 2019-2021. In order to contextualise our observations of contemporary cinema-going, we also consulted over 200 in-depth interviews on historical cinema-going experiences that were conducted during oral history studies (Çam and Şanlıer Yüksel, 2020). This methodology helped us to compare the two different eras. To situate Adana's cinema context into public discourse, we also consulted *Yeni Adana*, a local newspaper published since 1918.

### **Cinemas as multi-layered heterotopias**

There has always been great interest in cinema-going across industrialised cities like Adana. Miriam Bratu Hansen (1991) explains the interest in cinema, especially in industrial and port cities in its early period, through Michel Foucault's conceptualization of heterotopia. In

contrast to utopias (perfect forms attached to no real place), Foucault (1986, p. 24) refers to heterotopias as the places that “are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.” He further continues by emphasising heterotopias as unique spaces. According to him, for example, in the so-called primitive societies, there is a particular form called crisis heterotopia. This is a sacred place reserved for individuals in a period of a perceived socio-cultural crisis. A society could operate a heterotopia very differently throughout history and the same heterotopia can acquire one or another function, depending on the synchronicity of the culture it belongs to. Foucault (1986, p. 25) proposes the following premise that will pave the way for us to think of cinema as utopia and heterotopia: “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.” Hansen thinks that the expression Foucault uses in defining heterotopia, the power of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, exactly corresponds to the space of early cinema:

While this spatial configuration is as old as the magic lantern show and more or less typical of the cinema throughout its history, Foucault’s notion of heterotopia can be taken further to describe a more specific historical experience, during the transition from early to classical cinema, on the part of particular social groups (1991, p. 107).

The spaces specific to the inner universe of films and the extratextual experience of films combine different times, physical spaces, and places to form heterotopic landscapes. Cinema spaces also bring these heterotopic landscapes to non-places and bring new and multi-layered heterotopic spaces to life. Hansen exemplifies how cinematic space is transformed into a heterotopia with the Nickelodeon, one of the early cinema theatres, by bringing “of strange and familiar, of old and new, of ordinary and exotic” together (1991, p. 108). Again, according to Hansen, cinema spaces create heterotopias, for different members of the community, especially for women:

The cinema was a place women could frequent on their own, as independent customers, where they could experience forms of collectivity different from those centering on the family. Unlike mass-market fiction, which, much as it constituted a social horizon of experience, was still predicated on individual consumption in a private space, the cinema catered to women as an audience, as the subject of collective reception and public interaction. It thus functioned as a particularly female heterotopia, because, in addition to the heterotopic qualities already discussed, it “simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” the gendered demarcations of private and public spheres. The cinema provided for women, as it did for immigrants and recently urbanized working class of all sexes and ages, a space apart and a space in between (1991, p. 118).

Similarly, Annette Kuhn (2004) examines the relationship of cinematic spaces with the outside world and the audience's experiences and memories of these spaces, focusing on local cinema experiences, movie theatres and drive-in cinemas in England in the 1930s. As heterotopic spaces, movie theatres are places where the cinema in the world and the world in the cinema interact, and the experiences of watching movies are shaped by this interaction. Can all these propositions be valid for Adana between 1960 and 1975 as well as nowadays?

Adana is (or once was) an industrial city, even though the industry has collapsed today. Urbanization and industrialization in Adana were shaped by the development of cotton production. In the mid-19th century, the Çukurova region was designated as an area that could produce cotton for Great Britain, which was suffering from raw material shortages due to the American Civil War at the time (Toksöz, 2010). With additional labour force required for scaled up cotton production, the settlement policy in the region changed radically, and urbanisation began. In the city, which was the centre of national cotton production since the 1860s, agriculture-based production, industry and trade showed an extraordinary growth until 1940. While agricultural output continued to maintain its importance, a rapid industrialization process took place alongside it. Simyonoğlu Factory, which was established in 1907, confiscated after the establishment of the Turkish Republic and later named as Adana National Textile Factory, was the city's leading industrial asset (Çomu, 2018). Many subsidiaries of Sümerbank, a national textile enterprise, which started operating in 1937, also extended their operations to Adana. Industrialization gained new momentum with the introduction of the Truman Doctrine, the declaration of the Marshall Plan in 1948 and the Democratic Party taking power in 1950. The process of accelerated industrialization continued during the 1950s and 1960s, making the city one of the largest cosmopolitan urban spaces with a highly diverse and migrant population.

Agricultural production in Çukurova not only shaped the industrialization of Adana and its surroundings, but also influenced the social structure. Immigration to Adana met the need for an increasing labour force in agriculture. The major migratory movements towards the city included: from rural areas of Adana to the city centre; from other cities to Adana; and seasonal migration for agricultural work. The city's population growth, which was above the average for Turkey, continued until the 1990s. Considering the urban-rural population ratio, it becomes evident that Adana became urbanized earlier than Turkey in general. For example, in 1970, the urban-rural population ratio in Adana was more or less even, while in 1990 the urban population reached 69.2%, when the equivalent rate for Turkey in the same year was 59% (TÜİK, 2021 - 1990 General Population Census Database). As already discussed, the urbanisation dynamics of Adana up to 1980 were dependent on developments in agricultural production; the industry relied on agriculture for its continued progress. These dynamics determined the main motivation for the mobilities towards the city. In the 1980s, the migration flow originated from the provinces of South-eastern Anatolia. According to TÜİK (2021), from 1990 onwards, the net migration rate turned

negative. In other words, the emigration from Adana has exceeded the immigration towards the city. However, this statistically observed phenomenon does not mean that the population movements towards Adana have lost their importance. Adana still faces different categories of migratory movements today. While the migration of seasonal agricultural workers has been going on since the 1980s, Adana is one of the provinces that has also hosted Syrian refugees since 2011. Migration continues to be one of the significant factors affecting the dynamics and processes of urbanization in Adana (Aksu Çam, 2019).

Throughout all these periods, just as Hansen and Kuhn suggested in the context of their respective studies, cinema was the most important cultural activity and socialization space for both locals and immigrants in Adana as well. This was especially true during the period between 1960 and 1980, which turned out to be the golden age of Adana cinemas. That is when the number of open-air and movie theatres in the city reached its peak. According to research carried out by Nezi̇h Coş (1969, p. 19-26), during this period, 110 cinema enterprises were operating in Adana: 35 of them were indoor theatres and 75 were summer open-air venues, with the total seating capacity reaching 86,900. The population of the city centre in 1970 was 525,668 people (TÜİK, 2021 - 1970 General Population Census Database). When compared to the seating capacity reported by Coş, we can calculate that there were approximately six spectators per seat. During our fieldwork on the travelling cinema experience in Taurus Mountain villages, conducted in 2018 (Çam & Şanlıer Yüksel, 2020), we came across another crucial example. In Kargıpınarı, a coastal village in Mersin province which had a population of 1,500 people in the same period, we were amazed to encounter a cinema space, consisting of an 800-seat hall and an open-air-terrace cinema with approximately 1,000 seats. Having such a large cinema in a place with such a limited number of spectators appeared strange at first until we learned that tens of thousands of agricultural workers came every summer to work in the vast citrus orchards surrounding the village. So, the cinema was made to cater to migrant agricultural workers in the region. It reminded us of the traveling projectionist, whom we watched in the film *Endişe [Anxiety]* (dir. Şerif Gören & Yılmaz Güney, 1974), showing films to children in the tents of workers working in cotton fields. Thus, accelerated industrialisation, migrations linked to growth in agriculture and the fact that cinema has always been popular among the workers in Adana predetermined the extensive development of the exhibition network in the region during that period.

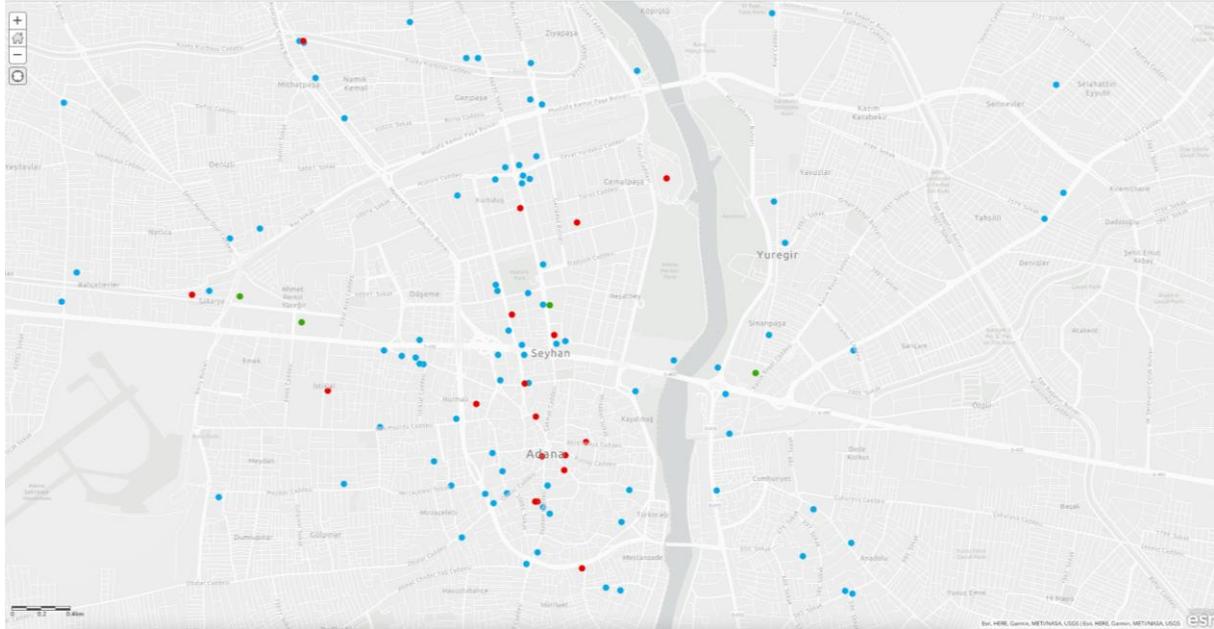
### **A year to be remembered: Adana cinemas in 1974**

The year 1974 was marked by a series of transformative events for Adana, its surroundings, and Turkey, in general. New technologies, like television, and socio-political issues, like the conflict in Cyprus, threatened the stability of traditional film exhibition, much like the COVID-19 pandemic does nowadays. Thus, it is useful to discuss these historical developments and the role of local authorities and organisations when drawing parallels with the contemporary period in order to contextualise the dynamics of local audiences and their continued love for event and outdoor screenings.

On 27 January 1974, Adana-İçel Television, a.k.a. Çukurova TV, started its regular broadcasts in the region. Initially they only took place at certain times of the day, with repeated pre-programmed content setting the norm. Moreover, the broadcasts were frequently interrupted due to “connection failure” (“Ceyhan’da Halk”, 8 May 1974) or could not be watched because of “interfer[ence] with a conflict area, namely Damascus” (“Şam Televizyonu”, 29 May 1974).<sup>1</sup> Still, there was an extraordinary interest in television viewing in the city. The number of TV receivers in Adana had reached 4,000 in a poll conducted six months after Çukurova Television started broadcasting, but it is estimated that there were at least “40,000 illegal television sets in the city” (“Adana’da Kaçak”, 29 June 1974). Passion for television in the city is reflected in newspaper reports and columns:

At homes, in shop windows, in coffee houses... Television is watched in great silence; people are so connected. However, it is challenging to separate people from this device, which has already become a passion in the city. So much so that even cinemas and theatres are not in demand as evening programmes aired on television (“Televizyon Hastalığı”, 24 May 1974).

This observation reflects the novelty and increasing appeal of television but the effects on local film exhibition were not as devastating as originally implied. At the time, there were more than 110 cinema venues operating in the city (see Fig. 1), according to a survey conducted only five years before the establishment of Çukurova TV. 35 were winter/indoor halls, and 75 were open-air/summer cinemas. The venues were also diverse in terms of social prestige and appeal to different classes. Operating expenses were high due to film distribution, programming costs and weather conditions (which required air conditioning during the hot Adana summers). Therefore, there were only a few luxury hall theatres, mainly in the richer neighborhoods of Adana. The periphery was mostly working-class, and many low-cost open-air cinemas operated in these neighborhoods. Figure 1 shows the locations of theatres and open-air cinemas, operating at different points between 1912 and the present, and their spread across different neighborhoods. Luxury movie theatres almost always included first-run films in their programs, whereas in the neighbourhoods and open-air cinemas at the periphery, double-bill programs included one first run and one-second run film. In most cases, luxury halls did not only differ from the others in terms of the films or the design of the space, but they also demanded a different audience behaviour. For instance, the audience attending the screenings in these halls was expected to be ‘modern’ and ‘disciplined’: viewers were not allowed to come to these cinemas in local/traditional clothing; after the screening started, the audience was not allowed to enter the theatre or leave before the break; it was perceived as crass behaviour to speak, to make noise or to eat during the screening. In contrast, open-air cinemas were known for a highly active and performative audience who talked, ate and interacted with each other during the screenings. Open-air cinemas attracted mostly people coming from the working class. They were spaces where family members, friends and sweethearts met.



**Fig. 1.** The map showing the locations of cinema places in the city of Adana, 1912-2021 (•Blue: Open-air cinemas, •Red: Cinema halls, •Green: Multiplexes).

While the new medium of television increasingly threatened the city's previously thriving cinema culture (Coş, 1969), social life continued to flow outside: theatres, such as Erciyes, Set, Nur, Alsaray, İpek, Ünal, Güleröz, Arı, Arzu, Sun, Asri, Çelik and Kışlık Sular, continued their screenings. In addition, as is customary, open-air cinemas, which operated during the long and hot summers of Adana, organised free screenings for children during their opening week in April. Open-air cinemas, such as Sular, Köşk, Gar, Site, Yeşilevler, Yavuzlar, Bahar, Aile, Narlıca, Çamlı, Şehir, İstiklâl, Işık and Çiçek, screened popular double-bills from earlier seasons, such as *Affedilmeyen* [*Unforgiven*] (Türker İnanoğlu, 1970), *Malkoçoğlu: Ölüm Fedailer* [*Malkoçoğlu: The Death Guards*] (Süreyya Duru, 1971), *Ağrı Dağı'nın Gazabı* [*Wrath of The Ararat*] (Zeki Ökten, 1973) and *Namus Borcu* [*Debt of Honor*] (Yılmaz Duru, 1974). The majority of tea gardens, beer gardens, ice cream parlours, clubs, casinos and pavilions operated outdoors as well. They appealed to their guests with similarly vibrant entertainment programmes. People spent their nights outside as the city's nightlife and cinemas catered to people of various ethnic groups and socio-economic statuses. In fact, spaces were so packed with people that many could not even find a place to have a picnic. When the people in Ceyhan district could not fit in the parks and gardens anymore, it hit the news that they had "a picnic in the slaughterhouse garden and the cemetery" ("Televizyon Yayınları", 8 May 1974). This testifies to the social and cultural importance of outdoor spaces in the region. Both this cultural legacy and the similar physical conditions contribute to the continued popularity of outdoor activities, even nowadays (a point to which we come back shortly).

International political conflict proved a catalyst for temporary but significant changes in social life though. In mid-1974, after Turkey's intervention in Cyprus, the country faced a war and the threat to the Adana region was particularly prominent, due to the city's physical

proximity, at the foot of the Taurus Mountains by the Mediterranean Sea. In response to escalating tensions and fearing a potential airstrike, the Turkish State of Emergency Command issued a statement, according to which:

Blackout will be applied within the borders of Adana, Hatay and İçel provinces to be implemented from the night of 21-22 July 1974. Lights in all buildings will be screened to not be seen from the outside, and motor vehicles will be used with a darkened light system (“Adana, Hatay”, 22 July 1974).

Starting from 21 July, open-air cinemas remained closed for a long time due to the imposed blackout. When the rules were relaxed, about half of the open-air cinema venues began to operate again (“Güney’de Fedakarlık”, 2 August 1974). From January 1975, Turkish Cypriot refugees also settled in the city, further contributing to the already vibrant migrant community. However, even if cinemas opened their screens and social life resumed, the city suffered the consequences of the short war. The country’s economy was destabilised due to a war-related embargo, and Adana was directly affected. Film imports stopped due to the embargo, and national film productions also decreased. All of these factors, but especially the blackout and state of emergency in the city, hindered the adequate operation of cinema activities for a while.

The war may have exerted the strongest pressure on the local cinema business, but it was not the only one. The devaluation of the Turkish currency disrupted the economic and social life of the city. When inflationary policies became unbearable for the people, demonstrations against the government were organized in Adana and other towns of the Çukurova region. The Golden Boll Film Festival, which was first held in the city in 1969, was organised for the fifth time in 1973 but was subsequently suspended until 1992 due to economic difficulties of the organising body, namely Adana Municipality. At the time, the city’s mayor argued that “the festival is not fully focused on art”, and that was why the Golden Boll Festival was not held in 1974 (“Altınkoza Şenliği”, 5 July 1974). However, the cancellation of such a cultural event clearly signified the financial turmoil which the region was experiencing.

One of the significant cash sources of the municipality was, in fact, revenue from cinema tickets, and the local authority lost that income, due to the decrease in demand resulting from cutbacks in film screenings. Adana Municipality established a new organisation to collect the duty tax that cinemas allegedly evaded during the financial impasse. With the initiative of Adana Municipality’s Press and Public Relations Consultant Fevzi Acevit and the approval of Mayor Ege Bağatur, the ruling political party CHP’s Youth Branch members were employed as temporary staff, and a cinema audit group was formed. There were on-duty controllers at the entrance of each cinema venue, and they were also supervised by chief controllers who were mobile. The municipality’s income loss was mitigated via these inspections, and a surprising increase in income was reported in this period (Acevit, 2006, p. 66-67). Mayor Bağatur reported that although Çukurova Television

had already been put into service and was competing with cinemas for the attention of viewers, they earned double the amount of income from cinema tickets than the previous year.

One of the important actors in the local cinema business was the Adana Cinema Venues Operators Association (Adana Sinemacılar Derneği). The association was established in 1969 and was active during the regional business model of film production and distribution. During the annual general meeting of the association in 1974, even before the Cyprus conflict, it was reported that the Municipality exerted significant pressure on cinema venue operators, and if this was to continue, the cinema exhibitors would resist (“Sinemalarda Kontrolü”, 25 June 1974). As the Municipality tightened its grip on the important cash revenue, operators increased prices, causing a further drop in demand for cinema. It is not clear whether it was a move designed against the cinema operators’ threat to go on strike or if the Municipality was trying to fill a hole in its budget. Still, the power and financial struggle between local authorities and cinema business owners contributed to the complicated exhibition situation at the time.

As previously mentioned, film screenings started all around the city again in September 1974, after the end of the war. Open-air cinemas, which were planned to be closed on 11 October, decided to work until 29 October due to the hot weather (“Adana’da Yazlık”, 22 October 1974). In fact, many of them continued their activities until mid-November. With the end of the threat of further military conflict in the autumn, the indoor theatres began to operate again and were packed:

Those who want to see the state of some cinemas in Adana, which can accommodate more than 700 spectators, should go to the night screenings at 21:00. More than a hundred people are gathering in front of the cinema... The audience is stacked inside, and the citizens still want to enter. An official from the Municipality at the gate... A team that controls the official. If you throw a needle at the cinema, it looks for a place to fall. It is very difficult to breathe (“700 Kişilik”, 30 October 1974).

As described in this news article, the desire to go to the cinema was tremendous after the war and the film economy remained crucial for the city. Cinema operators faced greater demand after the three-month closure period. Despite the impact of the newly-started television broadcasts and the economic crisis, the appeal of cinemagoing remained significant, especially when it came to socializing outdoors.

### **Being in and/or out: Cinema-going in Adana during the pandemic**

When we consider Adana’s cinema history, what happened in 1974 confronts us with a series of questions about the present and the future. Going out to socialise and see a film was practised as a regular habit in 1974 and earlier, even amid the economic crisis and in the aftermath of the war. Can we foresee a similarly resilient outdoor social and cultural

experience today? Moreover, what awaits the future of multiplex cinema venues at the shopping malls located outside of the city centre?

At the end of 2019, just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were six cinema multiplexes in the Adana city centre. Four of them (Optimum Avşar, Cinemaximum M1, Park Adana Cinens and Adana 01 Burda Cinema Pink) operated in the city's shopping malls. The total number of screens across the six complexes was 47 and the audience capacity was 8,789. As the pandemic hit, two of these enterprises (Park Adana Cinens and ArıPlex), which could not operate regularly until the summer of 2021, closed completely. Another (Optimum Avşar) decided to wait for the autumn of 2021 to start operating again. Therefore, at the time of writing this article (in the summer of 2021), only three cinema complexes (with a total of 20 screens) are open in the Adana city center. The total audience capacity of these establishments has decreased to 4,284 (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Cinema Multiplexes in Adana city center in 2019 and 2021.

Name of Cinema Multiplex	2019		2021	
	Number of Screens	Number of Seats	Number of Screens	Number of Seats
ArıPlex	5	660	CLOSED	-
Optimum Avşar	10	2 515	CLOSED	-
Cinemaximum M1	9	2 840	9	2 840
Park Adana Cinens	12	1331	CLOSED	-
Adana 01 Burda Cinema Pink	7	936	7	936
Metropol	4	508	4	508
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>8 789</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4 284</b>

Since two of these multiplexes are located in shopping centres, the cinema experience has turned into a shopping mall experience rather than a city experience. We can say that cinemas, which once functioned as city landmarks and spaces for interaction and socialisation have lost their function of demarcating the city landscape and bringing people together. This could be due to the impersonal character of multiplexes and the fact that heterotopic spaces of sociability are being transformed into single-purpose places of silence, forcing individuals to inwardly experience only the film in the multiplex auditoria. One of the consequences of this transformation in the experience of space is that cinemagoing is now performed and encountered as an 'atomised' (Senellart, M. & Foucault, 2008) activity rather than a shared and collective endeavour.

Furthermore, the dramatic drop in the number of seats, even before the pandemic, shows that the experience which was once commonplace for everyone has now become exclusionary and almost out of reach. While back in 1970 there was one seat per every six spectators, today, when the population of Adana city center of approximately 1,769,000

people is compared to the 4,284 audience capacity of the cinema multiplexes, there is one seat for every 413 people. This reduction in cinema capacity demonstrates a change in the ethos and social function of indoor screenings.

Nevertheless, communal film-related activities remain important for local audiences. In the summer of 2019, we followed a travelling exhibition program organized by Tarsus Municipality in the villages. These screenings were a re-enactment of old versions of ambulant screenings in the summer seasons. A travelling cinema projectionist screened films with a 35mm film projector mounted on a truck bed. Thus, we participated in the crowd's enthusiasm, watching old Turkish popular movies from 35mm film projected on a makeshift-screen on another truck. During our observations, we witnessed a performative cinema-going experience with people selling candy floss and balloons, spectators drinking lemonade and eating popcorn, walking around, children playing and running everywhere, and more women than men present in the audience, likely due to the programme of mostly melodramas (**Fig. 2**).



**Fig. 2.** The re-enactment of summertime open-air cinema (Böğrueğri Village – the Taurus Mountains, Summer 2019).

Furthermore, the success of the series of open-air cinema events held in Adana in the summer of 2020 under pandemic conditions demonstrated the continued demand for outdoor entertainment. During the second half of June 2020, right after a strict lock-down and when the commercial cinemas were not yet operational, Yüreğir District Municipality hosted a series of drive-in cinema events in the large car park of the public garden on the

banks of the Seyhan river. The transformation of the car park into a movie theatre is ironic because most of the open-air cinemas in Adana have been converted into car parks in recent years. It is the first time the opposite is observed. Moreover, for the first time in Adana, we witnessed the drive-in cinema experience. The films *Ayla* [*Ayla: The Daughter of War*] (Can Ulkay, 2017), *Müslüm* [*Muslum*] (Ketche & Can Ulkay, 2018) and *Cep Hercülü: Naim Süleymanoğlu* [*Pocket Hercules: Naim Süleymanoğlu*] (Özer Feyzioğlu & Hilal Saral, 2019) were planned to be screened for only three days. Because the demand for the drive-in screenings was so high, it was decided to extend the programme throughout the whole summer. We observed the extraordinary diversification of the open-air cinema, which goes beyond the physical space of the theatre hall, with cinema spaces transforming once again into heterotopic spaces (**Fig. 3**). The shift back to open-air screenings, triggered by a period of health and social crisis, actually allowed the audience to experience a cinematic space dissolving within the physical space.



**Fig. 3.** A scene from drive-in cinema organized by a district municipality, Adana, July 2020.

Another cinema event was held in a way that was unprecedented in the history of the city. This time, the screening activities organized by the Urban Planning Workshop of Adana Metropolitan Municipality within the scope of the 27th International Adana Golden Boll Film Festival brought the cinema not to the banks of the Seyhan River, but to another extraordinary place, on the river itself (**Fig. 4**). In the history of Adana, there had been open-air cinemas operating on the banks of the Seyhan river, such as Irmak or Garaj cinemas. However, it wasn't until the pandemic that screenings were organised for the audience to

watch from the gondolas on the river for the first time. During the events, organized under the name of Film Screenings on the Gondola, audiences had the opportunity to watch Turkish classics such as *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* [*The Girl with the Red Scarf*] (Atif Yılmaz, 1978), *Züğürt Ağa* [*The Broken Landlord*] (Yavuz Turgul, 1985) and *Arkadaş* [*Friend*] (Yılmaz Güney, 1974). Moreover, the screenings were held in a much more limited space than the space of the drive-in cinema events – and in a way that physical distance was much more strictly applied – accompanied by about 40 people in eight gondolas, as well as many spectators in the tea gardens, who saw the screen from chairs placed along the river banks (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4.** A scene from ‘float-in’ cinema, ‘cinema in the gondolas’ organized by Metropolitan Municipality, Adana, September 2020.

The screening spaces which we identified during these field trips and the testimonies conveyed during interviews with viewers from the Çukurova region (Çam & Şanlıer Yüksel, 2020) prove to us that alternative screening sites served and continue to serve functions different to traditional cinema venues. According to our participants who told their stories of the 1960s and 1970s, the physical structures of open-air cinema spaces integrated the filmic experience with the physical space. Unlike the closed and dark halls that require a cinema experience isolated from the physical world, these alternative exhibition spaces offered projector beams seeping through the branches of trees, a primitive curtain stretched over the mudbrick wall of a school or coffeehouse, projectors installed on a table or a coffee table, makeshift projection booths and seating arrangements with chairs

borrowed from a coffeehouse or benches from schools. Audience members also sat on rugs, mats, cushions, and even on horseback because the chairs were not enough.

In almost all screenings conducted since 2019, we witnessed similar patterns of reviving of the cinema-going experiences which we have been hearing about in our oral histories. Just like in the past, screenings were held in a chaotic environment that cannot be easily replicated in today's multiplex theatres. The audience performs and engages with what is shown on the screen, sometimes with applause and sometimes with the horns of their cars, starting a dialogue with the characters on the screen. The film watching experience becomes an experience of intense interaction with the screen and other spectators. Those who had this experience in open-air cinemas in the past tell us, and other young people and children, about Adana's open-air cinemas and their memories with a longing sense of nostalgia. This watching experience not only brings the past and the present together, it again blurs the boundaries of social strata and classes. Before the exhibition, we assumed that the drive-in cinema event –due to the social class context of car ownership– would only be attended by the upper-middle class population of the city. Later, we realised that we were wrong, when we noticed that the 250 cars and more than 2,000 spectators included people coming from different ethnic groups and socio-economic statuses.

## **Conclusion**

Alternative cinema-going experiences in Adana make heterotopic space possible through experiential spaces of multiple functions. Both Hansen and Kuhn point out that cinema as a heterotopic space still preserves its power to create a social space. The people of the city overcame all the crises of the past, and have continued to go to the cinema, especially when it forms part of special or nostalgia-fuelled social events. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw that socialization and being outside are a vital antidote to isolation and closure. Going to the movies provides us with the experience of simultaneously being present and not being present. While one foot is in the filmic universe, our other foot is still in the reality of the cinematic space. On the one hand, we are together with hundreds of people in the cinema space, but on the other, we individually relate to the film. Going to the cinema is extroverted and open; watching movies is introverted and closed. Director Derviş Zaim asserts that the practice of getting together collectively and watching movies will continue no matter what crises we go through:

People will continue to buy tickets... Because there is a ceremonial side to this (...) Our motivation and will to watch something collectively by gathering tens, hundreds, thousands of people will always remain. As long as humanity exists, it will always remain. I mean, if they came to a place in Çatalhöyük ten thousand years ago and went to watch the shaman clergy together, if they were going to watch the Karagöz-Hacivat play in Tophane in the 16th century, or if they were watching a movie of Charlie Chaplin in a pub in Galata at the

beginning of the 20th century; that unity and the state of coming together will continue as long as humanity exists (2018, p. 37).

This argument seems to be correct as we come towards the end of the summer of 2021 and more than 30 well attended open-air screenings have already taken place during this season. Of course, film screenings have been an experience that brings people from different backgrounds together under the common denominator of the “audience”, regardless of the venue and space shaping this experience. Our field studies in Adana show that the viewing experience in the theaters of the past and today differs from the experience of the open-air cinema. In the screenings held in the open air, the audience establishes a relationship with the film, with other audiences, and the heterotopic space formed by the coming together of the cinematic and physical space, by disrupting the relationship they have had to establish with the film and its space and destroying “the discipline” of the cinema halls. The cinema-going experience in open-air cinemas after COVID-19 is similar to the ritualistic experiences that heterotopic space suggests. Furthermore, the temporary nature of pop-up screenings both in drive-in and ‘float-in’ forms allows audiences to engage with more eventful and ritualistic experiences that bring people together not only to watch a film, but also to perform a collective and interactive encounter. So, reviving the open-air cinema tradition as a heritage seems a possible turn in Adana’s 120 years of cinema history, because these new cinema experiences open the door to new subjectivities among the audiences and the potential for community building.

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## Note:

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<sup>1</sup> The newspaper article refers to the War of Attrition in the Bashan Salient (1973-1974) between Israel and Syria.