KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
PROGRAM OF CINEMA AND TELEVISION

COMMUNITY BEYOND THE SCREEN: '!F PEOPLE' OF THE !F ISTANBUL INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL

UĞURHAN TOPCUOĞLU

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

ISTANBUL, JULY, 2023

COMMUNITY BEYOND THE SCREEN: '!F PEOPLE' OF THE !F ISTANBUL INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL

UĞURHAN TOPCUOĞLU
ADVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. MELİS BEHLİL

A thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Cinema and Television

Istanbul, July, 2023

APPROVAL

This thesis/project titled COMMUNITY BEYOND THE SCREEN: '!F PEOPLE' OF THE !F ISTANBUL INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL, submitted by UĞURHAN TOPCUOĞLU, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Cinema and Television is approved by

Assoc. Prof. Melis Behlil (Advisor) ……..
Kadir Has University

Asst. Prof. Elif Akçalı ……..
Kadir Has University

Assoc. Prof. Ece Vitrinel ……..
Galatasaray University

I confirm that the signatures above belong to the aforementioned faculty members.

_____

Prof. Dr., Mehmet Timur Aydemir
Director of the School of Graduate Studies
Date of Approval: 21.07.2023

DECLARATION ON RESEARCH ETHICS AND PUBLISHING METHODS

I, UĞURHAN TOPCUOĞLU; hereby declare

- that this Master of Arts Thesis I have submitted is entirely my own work and I have cited and referenced all material and results that are not my own in accordance with the rules;
- that this Master of Arts Thesis does not contain any material from any research submitted or accepted to obtain a degree or diploma at another educational institution;
- and that I commit and undertake to follow the "Kadir Has University Academic Codes of Conduct" prepared in accordance with the "Higher Education Council Codes of Conduct".

In addition, I acknowledge that any claim of irregularity that may arise in relation to this work will result in a disciplinary action in accordance with the university legislation.

Uğurhan Topcuoğlu

_____

21.07.2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I discovered the world of film festivals when I moved from a remote area of Istanbul to the center of the city for my university studies, and film festivals played a crucial role in my decision to complete a Master's degree in Film Studies. I am immensely grateful to all those with whom I conversed at the box office, parties, or during film breaks and who have become dear friends. I'm also incredibly thankful for the films I left saying "Behold! Cinema!" like Katie in The Mitchells vs. the Machines. Therefore, this thesis is first and foremost dedicated to all those who have cultivated a deep passion for films and the collective experience of watching a movie together in the immersive atmosphere of a darkened theater.

This thesis would not have been realized without the valuable support and contributions of Assoc. Prof. Melis Behlil, who accepted to supervise my thesis despite her busy schedule and the many other theses she had to supervise. It would never have become what it is today without an encouraging advisor who alleviated my insecurities and confusion, regardless of all my delays during this process, which I began pretty late in the first place. Melis Hocam, you are the heroine of this thesis!

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all my professors who, with their endless dedication and expertise, not only imparted valuable knowledge to me, but also drew me into the fascinating world of cinema., especially to the precious Ayşe Toy Par, Gülsenem Gün, and Ece Virtinel, whom I first knew as my professors and who later welcomed me as their colleague. Besides their highly insightful courses that broadened my perspective, I would also like to thank Assoc. Prof. Ece Vitrinel and Asst. Prof. Elif Akçalı for their valuable support during the defense jury of this thesis.

The festival that is the subject of this thesis stands in a unique place for me. If I could not keep my distance in this thesis, it is because of the festival's contribution to understanding many things that make me who I am. I would particularly like to thank Pelin, Uğur, Serra,

and Zaferhan for contributing to this thesis and all those other wonderful people who built a film festival around the dream of another world.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Charles, a beautiful soul who both intellectually and literally nurtured me during this process and took all my pain; to my family, who listened and supported me constantly even though they were still confused about what I was working on; to all my colleagues for their wonderful comradeship; to Tuba, Zehra, Deniz, and Astrid who asked me how I was during this quite solitary process and tried to make me feel better; to Emre who brought bags and bags of festival catalogs to me and never stopped listening even though I was talking his arm off.

This acknowledgment was written on the night Merve Dizdar won the Best Actress award at the 76th Cannes Film Festival, and I would like to repeat the passage Dizdar dedicated her award to: "To all the combative souls in Turkey waiting to see the beautiful days they deserve." Most of all, to Çiğdem.

COMMUNITY BEYOND THE SCREEN: '!F PEOPLE' OF !F ISTANBUL INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the !f Istanbul Independent Film Festival, which emerged as the first independent film festival in Turkey, based on the concept of "!f People" and explores how this concept envisions creating a community that transcends the festival audience. The approach of the festival, which cannot be defined as a traditional community-based film festival, yet prioritizes establishing a sense of community, is read through the lens of Chavis and McMillan's 1986 definition of a sense of community and the four criteria necessary for the allocation of such a sense. Positioning the festival in international and national film festival history and circuit, the study explores the festival's motivations for fostering this sense of community. To assess these motivations holistically, it uses semi-structured interviews with the festival's core team to explore the various elements produced by the festival, from its programming, side events, promotional booklets, and videos to social media content. Thus, it aims to challenge the efficacy of film festivals that may not at first glance appear to be community-based festivals in fostering a sense of community.

Keywords: Film Festivals, Sense of Community, !f Istanbul Independent Film Festival

PERDENİN ARDINDAKİ TOPLULUK: !F ISTANBUL BAĞIMSIZ FILMLER FESTIVALİ'NİN '!F'ÇİLERİ'

ÖZET

Bu tez, Türkiye'nin ilk bağımsız film festivali olarak ortaya çıkan !f İstanbul Bağımsız Filmler Festivali'nin ortaya attığı "!f'çiler" kavramını ve bu kavramın imlediği festival izleyicisini aşan bir topluluk oluşturma düşüncesini ele almaktadır. Konvansiyonel bir topluluk festivali olarak tanımlanamayacak olan festivalin topluluk hissi yaratımını önceleyen yaklaşımı, Chavis ve McMillan'ın 1986 yılında önerdiği topluluk hissi tanımı ve dört kriter çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Festivali uluslararası ve ulusal film festivali tarihçesi ve döngüsünde konumlandıran tez, festivalin bu topluluk hissini yaratma konusundaki motivasyonlarını araştıyor. Bu motivasyonları bütüncül bir şekilde değerlendirmek amacıyla festivalin programlamasından, etkinliklerine, tanıtım kitapçıkları ve filmlerinden, sosyal medya içeriklerine kadar festivalin ürettiği birçok içerik ve festivalin çekirdek ekibiyle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden yararlanıyor. Böylelikle, ilk bakışta bir topluluk festivali gibi görünmeyen film festivallerin topluluk hissini teşvik etme konusundaki etkinliği sorgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Film Festivalleri, Topluluk Hissi, !f İstanbul Bağımsız Filmler Festivali

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

!f: !f Istanbul Independent Film Festival

AGBFF: Adana Golden Boll Film Festival

AGOFF: Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival

IFF: Istanbul Film Festival

IJA: Istanbul Journalists Association

LFA: Local Filmmakers Association

Sinematek: Turkish Cinematheque Association

TCAA: Turkish Cinema Artists Association

TFAA: Turkish Film Friends Association

1. INTRODUCTION

As the introduction to this thesis is being written, I am more than sure that at many different festivals around the world, people are singing along with the onstage singer, dancing together, eating delicious dishes or clinking glasses, reciting their favorite poetry at a reading, watching a play or a film with laughter or a tear in their eyes. Festivals, like the title of Best Picture winner at the 95th Academy Awards: are (about) *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* (Scheinert and Kwan 2022). Almost everywhere in the world, festivals that focus on a local product/tradition, like Oktoberfest, Carnival, and Holi, or on specific art forms and genres, like a short film festival or a classical music festival, bring people together at the same time. Festivals are spatial and temporal phenomena that allow people to come together, build closer bonds, and coexist. Festivals' temporality is accentuated by the fact that festivals are held at a specific time of the year, for a few days or weeks, and that festival-goers set their yearly agenda according to the festivals they attend. After all, festivals are "a time of celebration marked by special observances."[1]. Alongside this emphasis on temporality, it is essential to draw attention to the celebratory nature of festivals.

Drawing on John J. MacAloon's (1984) reminder of the etymology of the word 'festival', Kirsten Stevens argues that film festivals share the exact nature (Stevens 2016, 142). MacAloon notes that the word festival, used in English and many other languages, originates from the Latin word *festivus* and the verb *festum* and expands the definition in the dictionary by adding a program of public festivity (MacAloon 1984, 246). In response, Stevens points out that the "Everything, Everywhere, All At Once" aspect of festivals may create an illusion, underlining their design as discrete celebrations that are meant to occur for a brief period and provide a substantially different or elevated experience compared to the norms of quotidian experience (2016, 246). Steven Noble contends that festivals not only extricate participants from their daily routines but also dislocate or

[1] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "festival," accessed May 19, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/festival.

obscure certain hierarchies and norms. "Relationships become more open and more extroverted to acknowledge the presence of others whereas everydayness is more introverted and centered within each individual – festivals allow for more "cross-pollination" across various groups as they become less cohesive within a festival." (Andruske and Noble, 2006, 2).

While film festivals may seem to create less interpersonal bonding than other festivals, it is crucial to recognize that they encompass more than watching a film on a large screen in a theater. With the conversations in the ticket line or the hallway, the parties, and side events, film festivals are places where the experience of being in the same place at a specific time is experienced intensely and collectively. "A set of behaviors or special observances emerge through the acts of securing tickets, viewing films and otherwise engaging in a collective indulgence of cinephilia which is promoted within the ceremonial space of such modern cinematic feasts." (Stevens 2016, 142).

In addition, Marijke de Valck alludes to the nature of festivals as sites of passage. In this transitional setting, film festivals, an event beyond the ritual performativity of individuals, are also extended cultural performances in which the commercial market rules of the film world are suspended. Therefore the "survival of the phenomenon of film festivals and its development into a global and widespread festival circuit has been dependent on the creation of film festivals as a zone, a liminal state, where the cinematic products can bask in the attention they receive for their aesthetic achievements, cultural specificity, or social relevance." (de Valck 2007, 37). These elements enhance the festival's cultural value, legitimizing its existence, ensuring its economic sustainability, and reinforcing its identity.

The creation of cultural value within festivals needs the active participation of various actors, such as filmmakers, producers, distributors, film critics, and academics. The festival audience is undoubtedly the complementary link in this vast network of film professionals. The audience also legitimizes the festival's cultural value by participating in its screenings, side events, and workshops. However, it can be misleading to put all festivals in the same category and assume that audience participation is essential only

because it ensures the continuity and cultural value of the festival. Just like considering film festivals only as alternative distribution networks. Because film festivals vary in size and type: "Next to the major and well-known film festivals stand a multitude of medium-sized, small, and tiny festival events." (de Valck 2016b, 1). While festivals function as alternative distribution platforms in this broad circuit, they may also encourage participants to engage, come together, cross-pollinate, and share actively.

However, without an emphasis on a particular community, such festivals may not be recognized as community-based festivals. Restricting festivals to certain labels might sometimes be misleading, just like assuming every festival aims to achieve the success and prestige of well-known prominent festivals. Diane Burgess notes that such assumptions risk oversimplifying and ignoring the diversity of regional, national, and international festival circuits. She adds: "It is important to distinguish between the classification of a festival's features and the evaluative benchmarks that either explicitly inform, or implicitly creep into, the discussion." (Burgess and Kredell 2016, 162). Therefore, as well as analyzing festivals as large circuits, it may be enlightening to conduct case studies providing a nuanced understanding of the distinct qualities of an individual festival that can also contribute to a better comprehension of the complexities of the festival landscape.

From this point, this thesis focuses on a Turkish film festival that may demonstrate that these labels can be misleading: !f Istanbul Independent Film Festival. This study comes from a highly personal position. Although the festival in question is not being classified as community-based, it made me experience a sense of community. The festival's disappearance created a cultural and social hiatus for me. The festival was established in Istanbul in the early twentieth century, claiming to be Turkey's first independent film festival. Representing a unique initiative within the Turkish film festival landscape, the festival was founded in collaboration with a movie theatre chain in Beyoğlu on the European side of Istanbul. A few editions later, the festival expanded its reach to the Asian side of Istanbul, then to Ankara and Izmir, and finally to almost 50 destinations in Turkey and abroad with online screenings. While showing award-winning and critically acclaimed hit films from international festivals, !f also aimed to screen films that

"underline the fact that sincere efforts for change, even on a small scale, can have far-reaching repercussions" (Yücel 2009, 9).

The festival's core team has repeatedly stated that !f invites its participants not only to watch films but also to create a dialogue, come together and advocate for change. By referring to their participants as "!f-people", the team was making clear the festival's commitment to fostering a sense of community. This sense of community did not only remain in the words of the festival's core team, as when they were dismissed by the company holding the festival's brand rights in 2018, a petition organized by a group identifying itself as "!f people" gathered many voices. Therefore, this thesis aims to comprehensively examine the mechanisms it uses to foster a sense of community and solidarity among its participants, which at first glance do not fit the traditional definition of a community-based festival, i.e., festivals that cater only to a particular community. This thesis first contextualizes the festival within historical and film festival circuit frameworks, elucidating its position within the broader landscape of Turkish film festivals.

Moreover, this study delves into the complex relationship between film festivals and the notion of community and their potential to contribute to building a sense of community. While recognizing that the festival under study differs from the typical classification of community-based festivals, it explores the profound impact of such festivals in fostering a sense of community. Drawing upon Chavis and McMillan's four criteria for defining a sense of community, the research explores how the festival, through its curated program, side events, promotional materials, and usage of social media platforms, have actively worked towards building a sense of community. To achieve these goals, this study employs a combination of the festival's archival and ephemeral materials, including print and digital media outputs, alongside semi-structured interviews conducted with some members of the festival's core team. Through these methods, the thesis aims to shed light on the festival's self-identification and strategies over its seventeen years of existence to foster a sense of community and discuss whether it is possible to foster such a sense without being classified as a community-based festival.

2. FILM FESTIVALS

As complex and multifaceted cultural phenomena, film festivals have received relatively limited academic attention until the early 21st century. While film festivals were inexorably burgeoning in almost every part of the world, there were few resources to draw on apart from a handful of works by festival insiders. While some studies addressed them, establishing film festivals as a distinct field of study has primarily emerged in this century. However, some scholars consider film festival studies as an area of investigation within the broader field of film culture rather than constituting a separate field in and of itself (Iordanova 2013, 10).

Whether as a field or not, the late emergence of film festival studies does not imply intentional neglect from scholars. One should also question how accessible festivals are to collaborate with them. The importance of active participation and observation, being there and being together, for a holistic assessment of this complex and multifaceted phenomenon is evident. Even today, most festivals do not offer academic accreditation; even if they do, it is only sometimes affordable for many. Conducting quantitative studies on festivals can be challenging due to limited access to festival data, as many festivals may not readily share or publicize their information. "All in all, festivals do not seem to find academics of much use at all." (Iordanova 2013, 4). Even in these circumstances, we know much more about festivals today, thanks to all the insiders and the scholars who have contributed to a better understanding of this phenomenon that is such a big part of our lives.

This thesis is about a film festival that no longer exists, and there are some limitations to studying such an event. One of the most important limitations is being unable to capture the festival's atmosphere. By "capturing the atmosphere," I refer to the potential lack of certain elements that contribute to the unique character of a festival. These elements encompass the experience of being there and, together, the subtle details that make a festival truly a festival - being unable to eavesdrop on conversations in the hallway after

a movie, grimacing when you do not like a question asked during a Q&A, or enjoying an after-party. An insider's account of small details may seem insignificant at first glance. Nonetheless, it can be crucial for understanding the uniqueness of a festival. Just as a festival insider, Kenneth Turan opens the doors of the worlds created by festivals with his own experiences. He reveals them layer by layer like an archaeologist in his book *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made.*

The book offers snippets of small moments that may not be directly attributed to the festival. While examining Cannes Film Festival, Turan also tells his encounter with a roller-skating newspaper vendor calling out "Nice-Matin, Nice-Matin" while narrowly avoiding being run over or being approached by a person in a Mickey Mouse costume who leads him towards someone with a Polaroid camera seeking payment for a potentially compromising photo (Turan 2002, 15). Although these moments may not lead to a direct conclusion about the festival's structure or politics, they help visualize the festival experience holistically. From a slightly nostalgic standpoint, I am saddened that this thesis will not be able to mention such moments.

Beyond those precious tiny moments, Turan presents an insightful approach to the international film circuit by using the similarities between festivals to classify. Festivals worldwide are categorized into three categories according to their agendas: Business, geopolitical or aesthetic agendas. Like any classification, one could argue that its constitutive boundaries have become blurred, permeable, or self-destructive. However, Turan's anthology shows that film festivals show similarities in terms of objectives and functioning and can be categorized into classes that will make evaluating them easier. Of course, it does not erase their unique positions in the festival circuit. Six years after Turan's book, Mark Peranson categorizes festivals as business and audience festivals.

While underlining the importance of festivals by stating that festivals create alternative distribution networks in the present political economy of cinema, he also says that new festivals are emerging worldwide while the existing ones are expanding in content and the products they offer (Peranson 2008, 25). Although audiences can access films they cannot encounter in this current political economy through festivals, one must note that

festivals do not make decisions based solely on the audience. When we consider that festivals as political actors are subject to the pressures of specific interest groups, as well as being interrelated and even in a state of continuous conflict for power, it becomes clear that festivals, which are categorized into two distinct types, essentially coexist in a core/periphery nexus. However, it should also be noted that these models represent an ideal, and some festivals are positioned amid these two types (Stevens 2016; Richards and Carroll Harris 2020).

In Peranson's model, festivals on the business side are organized with high budgets, without being dependent on ticket sales thanks to subsidies and high-profile sponsorships, prioritize premieres and guest appearances, and have funds to support the film production. On the other hand, audience festivals are organized with small teams with limited corporate sponsorship. They are not premiere-oriented, can host a limited number of guests, and do not have a continuous growth graph. Understanding festivals requires an examination beyond these characteristics, but also the interest groups involved. Because festivals are organized with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders: from distributors to sales agents, governments to sponsors, and audiences. Particularly in festivals with a film market, these actors have a more significant influence and presence (Peranson 2008, 23–24).

Daniel Dayan, on the other hand, says that when trying to understand what a film festival was, much of the time was spent answering questions of self-definition, identity, and character of the festival. He puts a particular focus on the Sundance Film Festival. Once he perceives that this identification process occurs within the minds of the festival participants, he moves towards observing the practices of the various groups. Dayan refers to "the written festival," where different participant groups create a verbal architecture with their performances diversifying through the written material they produce during the festival (Dayan 2000, 50). As Marijke de Valck argues, the author's attempt to interpret the complexity of the social construction surrounding the festival and its participants leads to the film festival circuit. Taking Dayan and Turan's writings as a starting point, de Valck argues that "film festival events are not unified, closed

phenomena, but, in fact, open up to an assemblage of performances and agendas." (de Valck 2007, 32–33).

While addressing the spatial restructuring processes of festivals, de Valck traces how new global power networks are shaped in the festivals. She reads this whole of networks, conceptualized as the international film festival circuit, through Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (2005), regarding their relations with the festival stakeholders and one another. The author argues that when considering national and international film strategies, the idea of the network will be important in examining the international film festival circuit (2007, 30). To support the concept, she focuses on the three festivals with a business model, which Peranson calls a behemoth, Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, and Rotterdam Film Festival. The selected festivals exemplified here are all European-based festivals, marking the evolution of the history of the film festival landscape. "It was the specific European geopolitical situation preceding World War II and the immediate post-war era that brought together the necessary incentives to initiate their development, which would later expand to a global phenomenon." (2007, 14). Thus, a historical overview of film festivals may help to understand the current film festival landscape.

2.1. A Brief Film Festival History

de Valck (2007) mentions that the first film festival was held in Monaco almost two years after the invention of the Cinematograph in 1985. That is to say, festivals are nearly as old as films. However, these were competition-based events. The first film festival/competition organized by the Société des Bains de Mer de Monaco, a publicly traded company founded by order of the then King of France, was held in September 1987, together with a photography competition ("Historique" 2023). The festival/competition lasted for three years. In the first two editions, to be eligible for the competition, films had to be shot in Monaco; in the third and last editions, this rule was abolished (Taillibert and Wäfler 2016, 6). This was first-hand evidence of such events' impact on film production. This festival/competition, even though without emphasizing a nation, only evaluated films to be shot in Monaco. Similarly, the first film festivals will be designed to prioritize national cinema and its exaltation. In the years following the first

festival/competition in Monaco, similar events, especially within exhibitions, continued to be staged in various European cities. Indeed, whether these events can be considered a festival may come to mind. Stevens responds to the issue of whether it is possible to regard any event with a film screening or a competition as a festival: "The distinction then becomes largely one of nomenclature—which events are called festivals and which are not" (Stevens 2016, 92). Taillibert and Wäfler point out that these competitions reveal several key features that would later characterize film festivals, including "the competitive dimension, of course, but also a social aspect with a very popular character, a strong link to the needs of the film industry, local integration and also wide media coverage." (Taillibert and Wäfler 2016, 8–9).

Some other events that attracted attention among the events described as film festivals in the early days included galas. For instance, in 1925, in honor of the thirtieth anniversary of the Cinematograph, a gala event was held in which famous French stars and some of the leading avant-gardist directors of the period attended. "This anniversary, however, clearly comprised a retrospective and historic dimension as well. It also dovetailed with the objective of promoting demanding and innovative cinema, associated with the making of a first cinephile position." (Taillibert and Wäfler 2016, 16). Essentially, all these components constitute parts of the concept we define today as a film festival. "If one wants to explain the contemporary "success" of film festivals it is imperative that we include a historical perspective." (de Valck 2007, 19).

de Valck (2007) analyses this historical perspective through critical moments in the development and transformation of film festivals and divides it into three main phases. Film festivals, which progress on the axis of galas and competitions, take on a different dimension with the International Exhibition of Cinematographic Art of the Venice Biennale, which emerged as a part of the Venice Biennale in 1932. Like previous events, but regulated to be held annually, the festival "was presented as an international and glamorous event attended by an elite audience of film professionals and the beau monde." (2007, 23). It would be a mistake to assume that all this fuss was only for celebrating the film as an art form. The festival was organized at the behest of the fascist leader Benito Mussolini, who desired to reinforce Venice "as a cultural center of Italy while making

claims about Europe and the world. For the Fascist state, film seemed to be an important addition that reinforced and reinterpreted claims about modernity, culture, and power." (C. H.-Y. Wong 2011, 10).

This instrumentalization was also reflected in the decisions taken at the film festival, where a prize called the Mussolini Cup was awarded, and the critically acclaimed 1937 film La Grande Illusion's failure to win the grand prize because of its pacifist approach was highly debated. The French then decided to organize a festival with a so-do-it-yourself approach (Turan 2002, 19). The festival was held in 1939 but was canceled for seven years due to the war. de Valck states that it is not just a French initiative. The French, British, and American professionals united against the fascist domination of the Venice Film Festival. Within her periodization, this first period lasted until 1968, film festivals emerged as the showcase of national cinemas. "The second phase is characterized by independently organized festivals that operate both as protectors of the cinematic art and as facilitators of the film industries." (de Valck 2007, 19). The second period, the era of programmers who considered film as a form of art, ended in the 1980s when festivals began to be institutionalized, and the following period started as festivals expanded their audience profile and provided platforms to promote the film industry. As the film festivals include funds supporting world cinema, they legitimize their existence and support the productions that will ensure their continuity. As production increases, film festivals expand in number and scope.

According to Turan, the proliferation of festivals can be attributed to interconnected factors." Newly active independent and foreign-language filmmakers' hunger for appreciative audiences, a need that dovetails nicely with audience members' yearning for alternatives to the standard Hollywood fare that dominates film screens not only in this country but also worldwide." (Turan 2002, 7). Elsaesser asserts that festivals have the power to decide which films will occupy the limited number of slots available in art-house cinemas or the dedicated screens of multiplexes. In this way, festivals play a significant role in shaping the programming and exhibition of films that cater to niche or specialized audiences (Elsaesser 2005, 91).

Indeed, film festivals were born and raised in Europe and have been shaped as alternative distribution networks. However, as we have seen in the case of the Cannes Film Festival, its ties with Hollywood were firmly established from the earliest years. It would be wrong to say that all festivals today have the same functioning and pursue similar motivations. Even though most of the media coverage is devoted to major international film festivals, today, almost 13.000 film festivals are listed on FilmFreeway[2]. Thousands of film festivals of various scales, formats, and genres, with different organizational and curatorial strategies. "If one assumes that every festival strives to be Cannes (or Sundance or Toronto), there is a risk of collapsing the irreducible variability of regional, national, and international festival circuits. It is important to distinguish between the classification of a festival's features and the evaluative benchmarks that either explicitly inform, or implicitly creep into, the discussion." (Burgess and Kredell 2016, 162). As the turn of the century approached, film festivals proliferated globally, encompassing various genres and formats, driven by multiple motivations, and characterized by distinct organizational structures.

2.2. The Film Festival Landscape Expanding

Although non-European festivals had emerged before this century, they relatively lagged behind their European counterparts. For instance, when the first film festival was organized in Turkey, Venice had surpassed half a century, and Locarno and Cannes had left behind their fifteenth years.

> Non-European festivals emerged slowly, as a sense of a festival world of networks and competitors took shape […] Still, global spaces have not been equal in either film or geopolitical position. Western Europe, with the Big Three festivals, remains the most dominant region for the film festival world, within which Cannes is the undisputed leader (C. H.-Y. Wong 2011, 11).

The relatively belated emergence of non-European festivals has indeed reinforced the perception of festivals as a cinephile phenomenon originating within the European and North American context (Richards and Carroll Harris 2020, 91). However, the film

[2] Browse Festivals, https://filmfreeway.com/festivals, Accessed on 10 May 2023.

festival landscape has grown and continues to grow worldwide. Loist says film festival studies also gradually move beyond their traditional European and North American roots (Loist 2016, 51). These studies help broaden the research scope and highlight the varied types of festivals. Such research allows us to appreciate the breadth and richness of film festival culture across different regions, showcasing their distinct features and contributions to the international circuit.

In addition to geographical variations, today, the film festival landscape consists of numerous events worldwide, showcasing diverse organizational forms and addressing various topics. Some festivals create spaces for representation, dialogue, and empowerment within the broader festival landscape by focusing on groups' and communities' unique characteristics. Wong (2011) analyses the burgeoning of film festivals, categorizing them into three main historical periods. The first period, from the 1930s to the 1960s, highlights how film festivals created histories within nations and cities. The second period, starting from the 1960s, focuses on the impact of globalization and the controversies that emerged within the festival landscape. Lastly, the third period, which began in the 1980s, explores the increasing diversity of themes and locations within the film festival circuit. As film festivals increase in number, they stage curated programs and events that appeal to different themes, ethnic groups, and audiences.

> Many American cities, for example, host festivals whose programs set up along ethnic lines, whether Chinese, African American, American Indian, Jewish, or other showcases of transnational or intranational connections. A Chinese cinema festival is not the same as a Chinese American film festival, although they both may program some cross-cutting international offerings in order to appeal to wider audiences. Other national or regional specializations (Brazilian, French, European, Asian, African, etc.) may go beyond heritage issues, although meanings can become ambivalent: a French film festival is more likely to invoke the global prestige of French culture and film, while a Latin American film festival in the United States or Europe seems, almost inevitably, to coordinate with local immigrant and heritage organizations (C. H.-Y. Wong 2011, 52).

Similarly, thematic festivals focus on specific issues or areas of debate, according to Wong, who argues that international politics influence the meaning of the festival, even if not directly. The increase in the number of festivals with political concerns on different issues such as sustainability, climate crisis, LGBTI+, and women's rights, and their

similarities and differences reveal the interconnectedness of festivals and their uniqueness. While the main focus of this thesis revolves around a particular Turkish film festival, it encompasses an examination of the historical background, evaluation, and academic studies of the broader Turkish film festival landscape. Thus, while observing the festival's relationship with other festivals, it also attempts to demonstrate its uniqueness.

2.3 The Evolution and Impact of The Film Festival Phenomenon in Turkey (1948-1964)

There is a widespread assumption that the first Turkish film festival is the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival (AGOFF). To some extent, this is true; AGOFF is the longest-running film festival in Turkey. One might ask, as festivals are by nature continuous events that appear like a ritual at certain times of the year, whether a festival with no continuity is at all. However, taking an overview of the initiatives that preceded AGOFF can benefit in assessing the evolution of the film festival phenomenon in Turkey. The columnist who anonymously criticized AGOFF's second year in *Milliyet*'s Arts and Entertainment supplement claims that festivals are not new in Turkey and points to an award night organized by the Yerli Film Yapanlar Cemiyeti (Local Filmmakers Association; LFA) in 1948 as the first festival of Turkey (*Milliyet* 1965, 6). First independent association of producers, aiming to support and prioritize domestic film production, to elevate it to world-class status, and to raise a voice against the financial struggles faced, the LFA also decided to organize a competition ("Filmlerimiz" 1948, 2).

It is not coincidental that the festival takes place this year because until then, Turkish cinema had only produced a maximum of 4 films a year, and in 1947, a record was broken with 11 films. Subsequently, this figure would continue to rise. It can be argued that the enactment of the Municipal Revenues Law in 1948, which mandated that municipalities receive a portion of the box office revenues from cinemas and imposed a maximum surcharge of 25% for domestic films and 70% for foreign films, played a significant role in promoting the demand for domestic films and hastening their production (Onaran 1974, 66). However, this policy also elicited contentious reactions, as concerns were raised over

the quality of films that incorporated borrowed elements from foreign productions in a hasty and often copyright-infringing manner. This ruling served as the initial catalyst for the subsequent criticisms towards Yeşilçam. However, it remains significant as the progenitor of the inaugural event, commonly called a "festival."

From the fall of 1947 until the following summer, the LFA's "festival" was to be held among 12 Turkish films to be screened in cinemas. Although six main competitions were initially determined, fifteen separate prizes were distributed. However, all the awards were given to three different films, and the film *Bir Dağ Masalı* (Demirağ, 1947), directed by Turgut Demirağ, the General Secretary of the association, won seven awards, including best director ("Filmlerimiz" 1948, 13–16). The impartiality of the competition aside, it does not program films and stands out more as an Oscaresque ceremony than a festival. The promise to organize the contest every year remains on the record. In 1950, LFA organized another evening with famous musicians, movie soundtracks, and dance performances. However, the association and its events do not endure for long.

Five years later, another association, Türk Film Dostları Derneği (Turkish Film Friends Association; TFFA), decided to hold a similar competition. Interestingly, although the event was organized as a ball in its first year, it was announced as the Turkish Film Festival. In the first year, the celebrations, which lasted until the morning in a way that references the etymological origin of the word festival, retake place in a quite festive way the following year with an addition. A film is shown at the end of the ceremony! Although we do not know the movie, we know that TFFA tried establishing a movie club, screening some French and British short films. Moreover, the association published brochures and reports to inform politicians and intellectuals about the problems in the film industry; these award ceremonies or festivals, as they say, were indispensable to encouraging local filmmakers (Arpad 1991, 2). Journalist Ümit Deniz, who described the three-year-long "festival" as Turkey's Academy Awards, asks: "In America, for artists, winning an Oscar is the most important event of their lives. So why shouldn't we give it to our local artists and deprive them of this enthusiasm?" (Deniz 1953a, 6).
Furthermore, everyone was quite pleased to encounter celebrities they would never see together in the same place at these award ceremonies (Deniz 1953b, 6). Despite their

Oscaresque nature, these events are exemplary in demonstrating the fusion of the festival concept with award ceremonies and the desire to witness the coming together of famous filmmakers and actors. These events provide a backdrop for understanding the popularity of the parade through the streets of Antalya during AGOFF. The celebrities' participation in this parade and the frequent mention of tabloid-worthy stories such as celebrity beach outings or disputes among jury members during the award distribution indicates the amalgamation of festival-related activities with the glamour associated with celebrity culture.

On the other hand, TFFA had emerged as a reaction to the Central Film Control Commission, "which, from 1939 to 1977, was responsible primarily for examining domestic films and secondarily for reexamining foreign films rejected by two other commissions in Istanbul and Ankara, respectively" (Kaya 2013, 131) and "descended on Turkish cinema like a nightmare" (Arpad 1991b, 2). The TFFA stood against filmmakers who made films exploiting religion to evade censorship, and the award ceremonies were instrumental in rewarding films that did not succumb to censorship. Although the tabloid dimension of these events has been highlighted, it is essential to demonstrate how festivals provide an opportunity for coming together to engage, take a position and raise one's voice.

The three-year-long TFFA award ceremonies are followed by another award ceremony organized by the Türk Sinema Sanatçıları Derneği (Turkish Cinema Artists Association; TCAA) nearly five years later: another "Turkish Film Festival"! Twenty-one films apply to the festival's first years open call in 1959; fifteen pass the preliminary jury (called the small jury) and are screened by 16 jury members (called the grand jury) at the Saray Theater in Beyoğlu for a week. Although we do not know whether these screenings were open to the public, it is mentioned that the audience objected to the decisions at the award ceremony (*Akis* 1959, 29). Meanwhile, separate from the festival, newspapers were publishing statements of support for the film *Üç Arkadaş* (Ün, 1958), which had been prevented from participating in the 12th Cannes International Film Festival by the General Directorate of Press, Publications, and Tourism. Signed by several producers, directors, and critics, and it is emphasized that this was the first time they had come

together (*Akis* 1959, 30), the statement of protest claimed that the participation of this film, which the majority of film professionals was convinced of its quality, to an international festival would provide Turkish films a good representation and an opportunity to open up to foreign markets. Until then, the participation of Turkish films in international festivals had not been regulated, and decision-makers' competence was questionable. It would only be possible for a film produced in Turkey to win an award at an international festival with Metin Erksan's *Susuz Yaz* in 1963. Moreover, the censorship board had tried to prevent the film from participating in the festival because it made Turkey look unfavorable, and its producer had secretly delivered the film to the festival. The government not only prevented some films from participating in international film festivals but also did not encourage the industry to establish film festivals (Onaran 1974, 66). As a result, there was nothing more than a succession of award competitions that labeled themselves as the one and only Turkish Film Festival where only local films competed.

Unfortunately, this “Turkish Film Festival” also lasted only a year. However, after a two-year hiatus, a festival organized as part of the Istanbul Art Festival has been considered its successor. The first festival was a joint initiative of the TFFA and İstanbul Gazeteciler Cemiyeti (Istanbul Journalists Association; IJA). Two years later, the festival was organized on the initiative of IJA and Istanbul Municipality, and this time the films selected through a similar pre-selection process were also presented to the audience. However, these films have already been released in theaters a few months ago. The effects of the first festival will be reflected in both the organization of the second festival and the production in the sector: The selective committee's position in the first festival, which does not approve of the actors being voiced by others, will create a willingness for the actors to voice themselves in the following years (*Akis* 1961, 34). The festival was again widely criticized by various critics and directors for its lack of impartiality and the competence of the decision-makers and again had a one-year lifespan (*Akis* 1965, 34). Another festival organized at the Izmir Fair in the same year suffered the same fate.

The anonymous article in *Akis* magazine begins with a criticism that calls these attempts festival fury, saying that Turkey had lived for years without knowing what a film festival

was and that now anyone who feels like it organizes a festival (*Akis* 1965, 33). In fact, this was not unfair; these experiments, mostly called Turkish Film Festivals, were only working on a local scale. Moreover, these festivals, undertaken by professional groups coming together through associations, needed more continuity and credibility. However, the author seemed not very satisfied with the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival: The festival, which includes the Governor of Antalya and his wife and the mayor and his wife, is an example that will do more harm than good. The author responds to the claim of the festival team to compete with Cannes as follows: "These amateurs, unaware of the distinctions between organizing a national versus an international festival and oblivious to the substantial financial, labor, and organizational challenges associated with hosting an international film festival, boldly proclaim their intention to outdo the Cannes Film Festival" (*Akis* 1965, 33).

On the other hand, *Milliyet's* Tunca Aksoy is much more optimistic and says: "It was very sudden, but it was good. It was our last hope for having a proper festival" (Aksoy 1964, 6). He reports that the festival was well received in the Turkish cinema milieu. Advocating that the festival would serve as a gateway for Turkish films to open to the international market, Aksoy was heralding the arrival of tourists, directors, and actors to Antalya.

The *Akis* reporter was against the festival being under the monopoly of a municipality and pointed to the Ankara International Short Film Festival among the four film festivals to be held that year. Organized by the French Cultural Delegation in Ankara and the Ministry of Tourism and Promotion, the festival required a maximum of three films of at most 50 minutes from participating countries. Moreover, for the first time, a jury was formed by international film professionals, and it was decided to give incentives to the award-winning director to shoot a film in Turkey (*Akis* 1965, 34). Turkey's endless "Turkish Film Festivals" cycle was broken that year. On the one hand, municipalities understood the importance of film festivals featuring renowned actors and directors to bolster tourism and enhance public contentment with their local governance. On the other hand, this was also the debut of film festivals that prioritize film's artistic value and attract international participants.

2.4 Navigating the Landscape of Turkish Film Festivals: A Historical and Comparative Analysis (1964-2023)

Here we are, in 1964, at the beginning of a "proper" festival that will last until today. One could mention factors that made these developments possible, such as Turkish director Metin Erksan's winning the Golden Bear at the 12th Berlin Film Festival in 1963 for *Susuz Yaz* and the Film Congress that brought together Turkish film professionals in 1964. However, we should especially underline that if we consider Turkey's inaugural film festival took place in 1948, from then until 1964, the annual production of films experienced a significant tenfold rise. This surge can be attributed to the growing popularity of Yeşilçam[3] and the increasing number of movie theaters, indicating a burgeoning interest in cinema in Turkish. All these developments were not enough to break Turkey out of its shell. The anonymous author of *Akis* states that the country was still unprepared to appear on the international stage. “All countries with a film industry, big or small, strive to make their presence known in international festivals. Turkey, on the other hand, with an annual film production number exceeding 150, was far from being well-presented on the international festival circuit." (*Akis* 1965, 34).

Indeed, while Turkey's presence at international festivals was relatively weak at the time, local film production continued to grow at an unprecedented rate. Within its borders, Turkish cinema experienced a golden age from the 1960s until the mid-1970s. Cinema-going is an important ritual and a means of socialization and identity. “It held significance to create lines in front of cinema halls alongside family, friends, and neighbors, sharing laughter and tears while watching movies, fostering a sense of collective unity in opposing villains and identifying with the hero.” (İlbuğa 2018, 64). This popularization of cinema has created a specific collective performance. It has also increased the interest in directors and actors. The effects are reflected in festivals too.

In the first year of the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, the articles in *Milliyet*, which had been optimistic, turned to tabloid events and discussions on the festival's competence. The jury's decisions were disliked, festivals were characterized as an arena of conflicts of

[3] The Green Pine: The name used to describe the Turkish film industry at the time.

interest where "dark games" have been played, the mayor prevents actors from giving award speeches because of his political views, the festival served only Antalya, and Turkish filmmaking has been used as a tool (Demirkol 1969b; *Milliyet* 1965).

In addition, tabloid events such as repeated photographs of an actress wearing a swimsuit, the award-winning director screaming and jumping into the sea, and the Golden Orange Awards being kicked on the table at the award ceremony were all being hyped up. Conversely, these tabloid events have helped to keep the festival going by bringing it into the limelight. After all, at the 7th Cannes Film Festival, "French starlet Simone Sylva dropped her bikini top and tried to embrace Robert Mitchum in front of a horde of photographers, resulting in the kind of international press coverage that secured the festival's reputation." (Turan 2002, 19). Popular movie magazines such as *Yıldız* (Star) and *Yeni Yıldız* (New Star), which frequently featured tabloid elements from the actors' daily lives that, in a way, contributed to the emergence of Yeşilçam's star system, also brought Yeşilçam to the attention of a wider audience. While Yeşilçam was increasing the number of its annual productions, there was also increasing attention to organizing many film festivals, from the Kayseri Golden Pastrami to the Karataş White Gold Film Festival. However, while these festivals had short lives, in Adana, another city on the Mediterranean coast like Antalya, the Adana Golden Boll Film Festival (AGBFF), which started in 1969 with the initiative of the city's cinema club and the support of the municipality, lasted for five years without interruption. Although it was not Adana's first festival (see Karataş White Gold Film Festival, 1965, which also employed public voting for the first time), the AGBFF, which was re-organized in 1992 after a 19-year hiatus, is still one of the most important festivals in Turkey.

The controversy over the merits and decisions of the previous festivals led to first the jury members of the AGBFF signing a declaration pledging that the festival would benefit the Turkish film world and that they would not violate anyone's rights (Demirkol 1969a, 8). However, the declaration has not prevented the festival committee from accusing the jury members of being biased in their decisions (Demirkol 1969b, 8). In 1970, while there was a debate that AGOFF should become an international festival, the mayor of Adana, the hosting city of AGBFF, apologized for being unable to bring in star actors and said that

he was trying to bring in big stars from Istanbul. Meanwhile, AGOFF's festival committee had found the strategy that would give the festival an international position: Inviting foreign actors to the festival. Another internationalization strategy of AGOFF may seem ridiculous and bizarre from today's perspective: The committee clarified that they had already taken measures for an international event. Thus, they planned a wedding ceremony for the Turkish Gastarbeiter fiancés by Turkish customs and traditions. These festivals were more like mass celebrations where municipalities could promote their services to the public.

The issue of internationalization would occupy the agenda of AGBFF and AGOFF for many years to come, and there remains an ongoing discussion regarding the limited international exposure of the most renowned film festivals in Turkey, despite two Turkish film festivals (AGOFF and Istanbul Film Festival) being officially accredited by FIAPF. During this time, cinema clubs were emerging in numerous provinces throughout Turkey, creating discussions within the industry about the quality of Yeşilçam. Since the early sixties, a growing number of directors, pioneered by Lütfi Ö. Akad was moving away from the narrative and narration forms of Yeşilçam and towards making social realist films. These films frequently drew inspiration from realistic novels in Turkish literature and addressed various social issues, including poverty, migration, urbanization, and problems faced in rural areas. Despite the solid Western influences, particularly from Italian Neorealism and independent American cinema, these directors faced challenges in achieving commercial success at the box office and gaining recognition among cinephiles and critics (Behlil and Cengiz 2016, 5–6). Expressing dissatisfaction with the quality of those social realist films as well as the popular local films produced, some cinephiles sought to watch foreign films with artistic merit and political engagement.

On August 25, 1965, the Türk Sinematek Derneği (Turkish Cinematheque Association; Sinematek) was founded. Quite quickly, the association started showing independent international films that had not been released in Turkey. Along with the finest examples of the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism, it brought many international films from the Soviet Union to the United States to its audience. Post-film discussions followed the film screenings; the association discussed the film per se and encouraged industry and

audience-based discussions to establish an "alternative cinema perception in Turkey" (Başgüney 2010, 68). Although it started under challenging conditions, the association reached a considerable number of members quickly, bringing together quality international films that had not been screened in Turkey and thus creating a space for the "festival films". Another importance of the Sinematek lies in building bridges with other countries; the relations established with the consulates and cinematheques abroad for supplying films would later play an invaluable role in the promotion of Turkish Cinema to the world. (see "Royan Şenliği ve Paris'te Türk Filmleri Haftası - Royan Festival and the Turkish Cinema Week in Paris" 2018).

"We opened with a program of about a hundred French New Wave films sent by Henri Langlois, the director of the French Cinematheque" says the first member of the Sinematek, Jak Şalom, who later took various positions in the association, and "a row broke out between Yeşilçam and us." (Yücel 2018). While bringing the films to audiences, Jak and the others also started publishing the *Yeni Sinema* (New Cinema) magazine, which achieved considerable circulation. Undoubtedly, the presence of the founder of Sinematek and writer Onat Kutlar plays a vital role in the association's publications.

Kutlar, who paved the way for establishing the monthly magazine *Yeni Sinema* a year after the association's foundation, makes no secret of his political engagement in his writings and post-film discussions. Sinematek, mainly composed of the intelligentsia at its foundation, was adopted by revolutionary students, oppositional left-wing intellectuals, and artists in the following years, especially by 1968 (Başgüney 2010, 78–79). While *Yeni Sinema* published articles arguing that Turkish cinema was not developing and was gradually turning into a mass entertainment that was distant from the reality of society, some Turkish filmmakers accused Sinematek of not being interested in and even despising local films. The only thing both sides had in common was to think that the other side was disconnected from the public. Sinematek was both accusing Yeşilçam of plagiarism and exploitation, and the social realist cinema of being inadequate and increasingly nationalist. The association and its press advocated for international "art" cinema (2010, 22).

At the end of the sixties, the Genç Sinema group, named after the magazine they published, emerged from the association and declared that they stood on the side of revolutionary cinema. The group's statement strongly opposes "Yeşilçamists," arguing that the current cinema order must be overturned. According to the group, this can only be achieved using revolutionary cinema supported by alternative film forms, such as documentaries and short films. In establishing the group, it is pertinent to note the presence of a festival. Specifically, the Robert College Cinema Club's organization of the Hisar Short Film Competition in 1967 aimed to offer aspiring filmmakers the chance to create their short films in 8 mm and 16 mm formats. During the festival, the group had the privilege of showcasing their films that were produced collectively. The festival served as a platform that united revolutionary filmmakers and film enthusiasts. However, in subsequent years, the group withdrew their films from the competition. This was mainly due to their objection to the festival's financing by certain sponsors. Despite its short-lived existence, the group holds tremendous significance and occupies a unique place in Turkey's annals of collective film-making (Yıldız 2017, 158).

Nevertheless, during the golden age of Yeşilçam in Turkey, one can observe that not only local cinema but also mainstream Hollywood films were being screened. Simultaneously, an audience profile was emerging, demanding to experience a broader range of films. Moreover, Yeşilçam was also experiencing a collapse as of the middle of the decade after 1972, the year that film production hit a record with 301 films. The feeling of insecurity in society in the political climate before coup, increased time spent at home, economic instability, and the spread of television had driven audiences away from movie theaters. Nezih Erdoğan argues that the liberal economic policies implemented after the coup, directly and indirectly, impacted cinema and that technological developments, especially in advertising, increased both the technical possibilities and the economic capital of directors. Erdoğan says that the films produced in these years were "festival films" that aimed to appeal to the European art cinema audience, which failed and did not attract the expected interest (Erdoğan 2001, 222). Although the impact of Sinematek on these developments is not discussed here, it can be said that the association was instrumental in bringing together a potential "festival film" audience in Turkey and forming such an audience profile.

"Excitement, amateur spirit, sincerity, political engagement, the belief that the world can be changed, confusion, clarity, depth, superficiality, fashion, conflict, contradiction, debate..." says Başgüney about the Zeitgeist of those years that Sinematek was generating buzz. Şakir Eczacıbaşı, who pioneered the establishment of the association and later the Istanbul Film Festival, emphasized that the Sinematek, which was closed with the decision taken by the coup d'état administration, was later transformed into the Istanbul Film Festival and that the festival would not have been so successful without the knowledge gained in the association (2010, 83–84). Several years before the coup in 1980, Onat Kutlar and a few Sinematek employees had already started working on organizing a festival under the Ministry of Culture's directorate of cinema. The team led by Kutlar started working under the name Istanbul Film Production and Screening Centre and screens films. Afterward, the center members are assigned to organize the 3rd Balkan Film Festival in Istanbul. Despite the difficulties and censorship, the team, which had no experience in film festivals, gained the experience of organizing an international festival. Only after the coup d'état some team members come together again to organize a film festival.

The first output of the festival only emerged two years after the coup, as part of the Istanbul Festival, a week in which six films were screened under the theme "Arts and Cinema." The following year, 36 foreign films were screened under the International Istanbul Cinema Days title for a week. In 1984, exactly twenty years after AGOFF, the event was not only separated from the Istanbul Festival. It was renamed Cinema Days, but two awards were introduced, one national and one international competition. The festival was renamed the Istanbul Film Festival (IFF) after its accreditation by the International Federation of Film Producers Association in 1989. The IFF is listed as a competitive specialized feature film festival reflecting new cinema perspectives. AGOFF is also listed in the same category as a festival that shows new current in contemporary cinema. Although both festivals do not include "international" in their names, the Istanbul Film Festival's homepage states that it is Turkey's most prominent and longest-running international festival (IKSV 2023). FIAPF's website states, "Turkey's largest, most established and most influential international film event in terms of audience and scope."

(FIAPF 2023). Unfortunately, we have little quantitative academic output to support or challenge these arguments.

Istanbul Film Festival may have achieved the internationalization goal that AGOFF will keep on its agenda for years in a shorter period. Hülya Uçansu, who was the director of the festival for 23 years from its beginning until 2006, says that after the closure of Sinematek, the festival had the mission of bringing international films to young cinema lovers. However, unlike Sinematek, they wanted to include quality examples of popular American cinema to reach a broad audience. Since festivals, not FIAPF members, do not have the right to screen these popular American films, they apply for accreditation, which is also a sign of prestige. Uçansu states that even though the festival was accredited before its ten years of existence, the inspections criticized the cinema halls where the festival screened films and the screening conditions from a technical standpoint (Uçansu 2012, 184–88). Apart from the ministry and municipality support it received for a few editions, the Istanbul Film Festival sustained itself with sponsors and ticket sales support under the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts hospice. Thus, IFF stands out as an alternative to the other Turkish film festivals organized mainly by municipalities. As we approach the new century, there will be an increase in festivals held by associations, foundations, universities, and companies.

Although film festivals take the names of their cities, for example, in 1988, the Ankara Film Festival was organized by the magazine *Bilim ve Sanat* (Science and Art), Bilar A.Ş. (Science, Research, Project, Consultancy and Organization Inc.) and the Mülkiyeliler Association (Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences Alumni Association); in 1995, the Mobile Festival, a mobile festival that visits not only the provinces of Turkey but also the provinces of neighboring countries, was founded by the Ankara Cinema Association. In 1998, the International Eskişehir Cinema Days were organized by the Anadolu University Faculty of Communication. In the same year, Turkey's first women's film festival, the Flying Broom International Women's Film Festival, was founded by the Flying Broom Foundation. In 2001, !f Istanbul AFM Independent Films Festival (!f) was founded by AFM Movie Theaters Chain and Kolektif Prodüksiyon with the claim of being the first independent film festival in Turkey, and in 2006, Workers' Films Festival was

founded with the initiative of trade unions and professional organizations to be a sponsor-free, competition-free, entrance fee-free, and alternative festival. In the meantime, interest in film festivals focusing on different genres and film forms has grown considerably. In 2009, it was reported that there were 34 feature film festivals in Turkey, which also screened shorts and documentaries, and 134 short and documentary film festivals (*Türk Sineması* : *Sorunlar ve Fırsatlar* 2010, 88–91). By 2017, there were approximately 200 festivals, and several municipalities in Anatolia had taken the initiative to organize film festivals, so the number varies from year to year (Gülçur et al. 2017, 90).

Here, I would like to discuss the following fragmentation: As observed in the preceding section, the proliferation of Turkish Film Festivals with identical titles strongly emphasizes local cinema and the star system. The continuation of this phenomenon consists of today's festivals organized by municipalities that economically support festivals by considering their contribution to visibility, local satisfaction, and tourism in their provinces and districts. To historicize this breakdown, we can take the organization of AGOFF on one side and the establishment of the Sinematek and Ankara International Short Film Festival on the other, i.e., 1964-5. Although the festivals have changed and transformed since then, for example, AGOFF also organizes international competitions and !f was holding a national competition; I assert that they might address a different type of audience. Of course, it is not to say that no audiences attend several of these festivals. Particularly local film professionals attend most of these festivals as they are important parts of the regional film festival circuit. At AGOFF and AGBFF, however, although they show international films, the emphasis on national cinema is prominent. However, the fact that !f and IFF had initially displayed a similar approach to Sinematek, which screened films with certain artistic merit, even if not politically, suggests that they might appeal to a somewhat different audience profile.

It is crucial to consider that these Istanbul-based festivals do not necessarily have direct lineage to the Sinematek practices. Uçansu states that the festival audience is different from the Sinematek audience, demanding more comfort; the Istanbul Film Festival kept some traditions of the Sinematek alive and it functions as a film school for a few emerging directors, like Sinematek (Uçansu 2012, 110). While AGOFF and AGBFF arguably

continue to reinforce the local star system and national cinema, for instance, AGOFF still organizes the stars' parade, with their screenings and side-events; the other Istanbul-based festivals place great importance on the participation of well-known international directors, mostly independent ones, and trying to make an impact internationally.

Another reason for the low emphasis on national cinema at the beginning of these festivals may be the number of local film productions in the years of their establishment. The inception of these festivals occurred concomitantly with the downturn of Yeşilçam production. In 1982, when the IFF commenced, there were 70 domestic films released, whereas, in the year of !f's inauguration, the number dwindled to fewer than 20. As examining film festivals continues to uncover their distinctiveness and connections, their similarities and divergences may challenge the current proposition. Therefore, it is hoped that analyzing individual cases, as presented in this thesis, along with their interconnectedness, will contribute to advancing film festival studies in Turkey.

2.5 Film Festival Studies in Turkey

Festival organizers created the first written sources on film festivals in Turkey. While the number of festivals organized in Turkey was still limited to a handful, film critic Erman Şener wrote a book entitled *Festivals* describing film festivals and competitions in Turkey. Şener explains that it took "so long" for a film festival or competition to be organized in Turkey with low film production (Şener 1972, 7). *Festivals* is an archive book on the historical context of the festivals.

As for Turkey's representation at international festivals, such information can only be found in newspaper archives. For example, a small clipping I came across in the archive about Berrin Diktürk's invitation to the 5th Cannes Film Festival, about whom we cannot find much information today except for her resemblance to Zsa Zsa Gabor and her remarkable appearance, recalls how this area remains almost unexplored and emphasizes the importance of archival work. Similarly, correspondence documenting a 1975 festival in Royan, France, featuring a curated selection of Turkish films underscores the

importance of comprehensively considering Turkey's participation in international film festivals and its affiliation with such events.

Hence, the book *Festivals* assumes great significance in the annals of history. Additionally, the works of film critics in such as Burçak Evren, Jak Şalom, Giovanni Scognamillo, Sungu Çapan, Atilla Dorsay, and Onat Kutlar, all of whom are associated with Sinematek, and their contributions to various periodicals such as *Yeni Dergi, Yedinci Sanat, Video Cinema,* and *Milliyet Sanat,* centered on individual festivals offer valuable insights into the zeitgeist and the structure and history of film festivals. Moreover, the chroniclers of *Milliyet* - namely Altan Demirkol, Ümit Deniz, and Tarık Deniz - extensively covered AGOFF and AGBFF. In the subsequent years, Alin Taşçıyan's interviews and articles, which concentrate on IFF and !f, emerge as insider accounts that will prove instrumental in chronicling the history of film festivals in Turkey and comprehending their organizational frameworks. sadibey.com, an independent communication platform for advancing filmmaking and filmmakers, has significantly contributed to festival archiving. Thanks to this platform, it is possible to access numerous ephemeral outputs, such as posters, catalogs, and press releases, from past film festivals held in Turkey, even if they are no longer active. This website is invaluable in preserving Turkish film festivals' history, especially the small ones.

Based on Stevens' (2016) suggestion, Erkılıç argues that the literature on film festival studies in Turkey also falls into three groups: newspaper/magazine news/commentaries, festival studies books, and postgraduate theses (Erkılıç 2021, 10). An examination of the National Thesis Centre of the Council of Higher Education reveals a surge in the production of master and doctoral theses concerning film festival studies in recent years. Before 2005, the quantity of these theses focused on film festivals was confined to five. However, by 2022, this figure had risen to five, indicating a significant escalation in research activities in this field over the last two decades (Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı 2023). The first study produced related to film festivals stands out as a master's study written in 1990. The thesis titled "Turkish Cinema in the Context of international film festivals" chronologically lists the major Turkish and international film festivals and gives information on their historical background. It focuses on the awards received by

Turkish cinema at international festivals and the cinematic, artistic, commercial, and economic contributions of these awards to national promotion through interviews with award-winning directors (Yıldırım 1990, 109). However, the thesis may not be evaluated within the scope of film festival studies but within the scope of promoting national cinema and national identity. Following the development of film festival studies as a field, the publication of monographs analyzing film festivals in Turkey is approximately a quarter of a century after this thesis.

Beyler Yetkiner's monograph entitled *Türkiye'de Film Festivalleri* (Film Festivals in Turkey, 2019) presents an analysis of the relationship between cinema and film festivals in Turkey, with a specific focus on the financing and production support of films in conjunction with these festivals. The book is divided into three sections, with the first section primarily exploring the relationship and the second section classifying major film festivals throughout the country. He categorizes festivals according to their contractors as festivals organized by municipalities, NGOs, official institutions, and universities and according to their themes as festivals on environment and nature, women, religion and ethics, human rights, etc. However, the criteria upon which this classification is based remains unclear, as some festivals are examined based on financial contractors, while others are grouped according to themes or genres. For instance, animation film festivals are listed in a separate category, while documentary film festivals are not. Morever, Kuirfest, Turkey's first queer film festival, which has been running for over ten years, is not listed in any category. Certainly, the task of categorizing film festivals is a complex undertaking due to their unique nature and diverse characteristics. Despite the inherent challenges, Yetkiner attempts to shed light on the matter by considering different criteria. However, this approach can lead to difficulties in understanding festivals that may fit more than one category, like the festival that is the subject of this thesis.

The most valuable aspect and strength of Yetkiner's book come in the third part, where he interviews festival managers, staff, directors, and critics to gain a more nuanced understanding of film festivals in Turkey. Although these interviewees' views have appeared in different theses and articles, it is essential to bring them together to understand the local festival circuit and take a snapshot of the film festival landscape in

Turkey. At the same time, we certainly need more examples of testimonies and monographs written by insiders to improve our understanding of the inner workings of film festivals in Turkey. For instance, the memoir *Memories of a Long-Distance Festivalist,* authored by Hülya Uçansu, who served as the director of the IFF for 23 years, stands as a significant testimony due to its wide-ranging coverage of not only the IFF but also the era of the Sinematek.

Moreover, Turkish film festivals have yet to be subjected to many studies regarding their interrelationships; however, this is about to change. The project called "Film Festivals in Turkey: Structure, Economy, Organization and Audience Profile: Case Study of the Film Festivals of Antalya, Adana, Istanbul, and Ankara" brings together academics working on film festivals in Turkey. The first stages of this thesis were also laid at the symposium organized within this project's scope. The project aims to define the organizational and institutional structures, festival programming, economics, and the main characteristics of film festivals in Turkey, to identify their role in the development of national cinema, and to assess their contribution to the cultural economy of the Turkish cities in the context of cultural/creative industries. In this framework, the research aims to provide a holistic output to the study of film festivals in Turkey by examining the four major film festivals in Turkey, Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, Adana International Golden Boll Film Festival, Istanbul Film Festival and Ankara International Film Festival, which are at the forefront in terms of size while showing different characteristics from one another (Screenfest 2023). Thus, at the end of this project, we will have a clearer insight into the fragmentation mentioned above.

It might be helpful to focus on one of these Istanbul-based festivals, which is partitioned from the municipally sponsored festivals, and to do so from a point where these two festivals can be differentiated from each other. After all, according to Yetkiner's (2019) classification, !f falls into the "other festivals" category as it does not fit into any specific category (Yetkiner 2019, 90). The involvement of a cinema chain as the main sponsor brought about a unique framework for its organizational and financial sustainability. This is because Turkish festivals can be broadly divided into two groups according to their economic and organizational models: those run by municipalities and those run by

foundations or associations. This thesis, however, takes this financial uniqueness and the relative space of freedom it opens up for the festival, as well as the community discourse that the festival employs, and discusses steps the festival has taken to foster a sense of community.

Thus, the third chapter of the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the concepts of community and sense of community and their relevance to film festivals. Specifically, the study will explore the extent to which McMillan and Chavis' (1986) four criteria, which have been deemed instrumental in establishing and investigating a sense of community, apply to film festivals and their ability to foster a sense of community. Through this analysis, the study will shed light on the potential relationship between film festivals and the creation of a sense of community and assess the feasibility of using McMillan and Chavis' criteria to evaluate the impact of film festivals on community-building.

3. FILM FESTIVALS AND COMMUNITY

Festivals, by their essence, bring individuals together. However, their temporary nature may raise questions about the longevity of their impact outside the festival context. Moreover, some festivals may be organized with purely commercial concerns and interests, so the function of bringing people together can be seen to ensure the festival's continuity. Whatever the motivation and despite their temporary nature, festivals offer “an experience which is fundamentally different or elevated compared to the norms of everyday life.” (Stevens 2016, 142). They can take individuals out of their daily routines and norms, thus creating an occasion for shared experiences, cross-cultural exchanges, bonding, networking, and a sense of community. Nevertheless, festivals may need to make extra efforts to create such occasions.

In the case of film festivals, the main goal may be finding an audience for each programmed film. Peter Bosma articulates that the main product of a film festival is its curated program. "To be able to promote the programme properly, it is necessary to create a recognizable 'corporate identity', in other words, a clear curatorial profile" (Bosma 2015, 71). Indeed, a clear curatorial profile for creating a recognizable organizational identity is crucial for festivals. This corporate identity also helps festivals to presuppose an ideal audience. "Relying on an audience to recognize and apprehend their aesthetic intentions, events create their programs with the expectation that they will reach an audience capable of understanding and engaging with their articulation of cinematic taste." (Stevens 2016, 164). After all, each film festival seeks its audience; in the absence of such an audience, it creates its own one, educates it, and acts as a matchmaker between the curated program and its audience. The festival organizers match curated films and the suitable public and “build structures that enable a fruitful exchange among all these people with different interests.” (C. H.-Y. Wong 2011, 128). In the omnipresence of festivals, not only finding an audience but also ossifying it and reinforcing its connection to the festival becomes crucial for its continuity. On the other hand, some festivals can also have motivations to actively bring participants together, foster dialogue, and

encourage exchange among them. By establishing safe and inclusive spaces, festivals can foster a sense of community among their participants.

Festivals' community-building ability is often studied for community-oriented, such as activist (Roy 2016; Derrett 2003) and identity-based festivals (Popescu 2015; Póvoa 2023). Reading festivals solely according to Peranson's binary coding of business or audience model, one may make a superficial inference that festivals with a business model do not worry about creating a community. And even if they do, it might seem to sustain their own existence. Similarly, audience festivals can be thought of as trying to create or strengthen a community because of their quality of bringing people or different communities together. However, every festival deals with businesses, including minuscule ones, from distribution to production to ensure their reproduction (C. H.-Y. Wong 2011, ix–1).

Reducing festivals to systems that conceptually distinguish them according to broad characterizations, even though it may provide some conveniences, also limits a broader assessment. Stevens stands out for the idea that many international film festivals occupy bipolar positions (Stevens 2016, 106). Indeed, !f Istanbul, the focus of this thesis, is situated in a similar ambiguity. Despite having high-end corporate sponsorships, it is not premiere-oriented. The festival supports emerging professionals with production, script, filmmaking labs, workshops, and funding, but it does not have a market. Initially, the festival had no competitions, but in the following years, it organized competitions such as "!f Inspired" for filmmakers presenting their debut and second features and "Love&Change" for activist documentaries. Still, these are far from the "major competitions" Peranson refers to. A brief examination of the expanding organizational structure and the increasing involvement of commercial partners associated with the festival under study might suggest that financial motivations fundamentally drive the festival's engagement with its participants. However, the festival has consistently referred to its participants as "!f people" since its early editions, along with the extensive discussions by the festival's core team about their intention to foster a sense of community. This ambiguity may create an opportunity for the festival to be an intersection area as it has sections that would attract people from different communities. Thus, examining the

festival's aspiration or concern to cultivate a community becomes relevant. Therefore, this section begins by reviewing the concept of community and the ongoing debates around its definition. It employs the criteria and definition of a sense of community to analyze the factors and motivations involved in the community-building process. Subsequently, it examines the use of the term community within film festival studies and explores the various motivations driving different film festivals to cultivate a sense of community.

3.1. What is Community? Why Build It?

Before moving on to the motivations and methods of community building in film festivals, it would be worth discussing what community refers to. However, when discussing such a word, I argue that Latour's point that when talking about the social, it should not be construed as a kind of material or domain (Latour 2005, 3) may also be necessary for the word "community". Instead of starting a debate with a definition from the dictionary, I head towards sources that draw attention to the use of this word, a word used so widely.

As Jono Bacon points out in the preface to his book *The Art of Building Community: Building the New Age of Participation,* community is "a funny ol' word" (Bacon 2009, xix), and it is everywhere in nature. Nevertheless, a group of a few beings coming together does not always form a community. "It is not merely the group that generates community, but the interactions within it" (2009, 4–5). Because of this interactive and unique nature, it becomes challenging to restrict community to a monolithic definition, as does community building. Although the many unknown equations in the motivations of the community, the place where they come together, their basic needs, and how to manage them do not make a single construction method effective, it would be helpful to scrutinize the primary motivations of why one would want to build a community and some methods that can be deemed broadly applicable.

Hence, a preliminary exploration of the elements that constitute a community before embarking on the community-building process may facilitate the cultivation of a more comprehensive perspective. Joseph R. Gusfield explains these elements as: "familial, kin, territorial, ethnic, religious; the sense of being part of a common group where loyalties

and obligations rest on affective, emotional elements" (Gusfield 1978, 10). On the other hand, Peter Block directly links the community to the experience of belonging and asserts that we are in a community every time we find a place where we belong. However, it should be noted here that belong does not refer to a single meaning.

> First and foremost, belong is to be related to and a part of something. It is membership, the experience of being at home in the broadest sense of the phrase. It is the opposite of thinking that wherever I am, I would be better off somewhere else. Or that I am still forever wandering, looking for that place where I belong. […] The second meaning of the word belong has to do with being an owner: Something belongs to me. To belong to a community is to act as a creator and co-owner of that community. (Block 2009, xii).

Examining the use of the word "community" in sociological contexts in the light of its historical development, Gusfield argues that "community" is also used in two primary senses. One is territorial and occurs in location, physical place, and geographic contexts. The other is relational, referring to the quality or character of human relationships without the intervention of the location. However, these two senses are not mutually exclusive but can co-exist and help to reveal the uniqueness of the term community. A primary concern of community studies is that social changes towards more central and diverse social units have given rise to one sense to the other. This emerging usage is problematic in that it is stuck in examining how it enables or detracts from territorially based social relations (Gusfield 1978, xv–21).

Moreover, what we understand from the community today is changing and transforming. The territorial and the relational are becoming more intertwined, and the traditional, same-as-same-place conception of community is being replaced by communities with unique characteristics. For instance, what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities" are those that are not territorially defined and whose members do not have direct relations with each other but are formed by the coming together of people who share a common cultural identity and history. The term "imagined" refers to the suggestion that these communities are not necessarily based on direct in-person encounters but even implies a community of individuals who may never contact each other. Thus, without territorial or relational cohesion, communities might be constituted through shared symbols, languages, histories, and other cultural artifacts (Anderson

1991). Talking about international film festivals, Bill Nichols asserts that they are complicit with the construction of imaginary nation-states and "simultaneously an arena where other imagined communities can arise, articulate themselves, coalesce, and contend." (Nichols 1994, 81). What about the communities of festivals smaller in size and bringing together a more localized audience?

While the concept of community encompasses various meanings and attributes, the impact of communities is far-reaching. Rather than defining individuals solely through their affiliation with communities, the emphasis here lies in the shared experience of togetherness within social contexts, even if physical interaction is absent. The act of engaging with shared values and engaging in dialogue enables the possibility of social change. The importance and purpose lie in the collective nature of human interaction and its potential for fostering connections and driving societal transformations. Therefore, exploring the motivations and criteria to foster a sense of community might be beneficial in whichever context it is used.

3.2. Sense of Community

The "sense of community" concept has emerged as a critical insight in community psychology. Psychologist recognized for his contributions to various fields of psychology, in particular community psychology, Seymour B. Sarason, defines the sense of community as the acknowledgment of shared characteristics among individuals, the establishment of trust and reliance on each other, the commitment to maintaining this trust through reciprocal actions and meeting expectations, and a dedication to a broader, dependable, and stable structure. He argues that it is "the key to the understanding of one's society's most pressing problems, the dark side of individualism, manifested in alienation, selfishness and despair" (Sarason 1974, 157).

Psychologists David M. Chavis and David W. McMillan (1986) argue that it is worthwhile to examine what the individuals who make up a community have in common regarding a sense of community and that we ought to learn to use it as a tool to promote understanding and cooperation. Thus they propose four criteria for a theory and definition of sense of community. These four criteria are as follows:

1. Membership: the feeling of belonging or sharing a sense of personal relatedness.
2. Influence: a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group, and of the group mattering to its members
3. Reinforcement: integration and fulfillment of needs.
4. Shared Emotional Connection: the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences.

The blend of the four criteria creates the following definition: "Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together." (Mcmillan and Chavis 1986).

Membership is more about boundary demarcation; members invest themselves in feeling they belong to a community. Boundaries, emotional security, belonging and identification, personal investment, and the creation of a shared symbol system all operate together to determine who is part of the community and who is not.

Influence is bi-directional and argues that for an individual to be part of a community, they need to actively participate and influence the decisions and actions of the community. Hence, it functions simultaneously, and the more influence a member has in the community, the more influence the community has on the member.

Reinforcement is about turning to what serves one's needs. People gravitate towards communities of people whose skills and competencies benefit them. Sharing similar values, needs, and priorities, the stakeholders of the community together develop a belief in reinforcement.

The shared emotional connection indicates that individuals identify with this shared history, even though they may not all possess a common one. As individuals interact more and the quality of interaction increases, they become closer, the common ground grows, and personal investment rises. This process enables people from different backgrounds to identify with a shared community history, enhancing their connection to the community.

McMillan revisited their theorization ten years later and renamed the four criteria. While the content of the criteria remains essentially the same, membership was replaced by spirit, influence by trust, reinforcement by trade, and shared emotional connection by art. The criteria become more connected; the spirit starts as a spark, and what ignites this spark is trust. Trade creates a social economy. “In a social economy, the most risky and valuable self-disclosures involve the sharing of feelings. A community’s members begin by sharing feelings that are similar, i.e., that they have in common.” (McMillan 1996, 321). All those elements work together to “create a shared history that becomes the community’s story symbolized in art.” (1996, 322).

Despite the absence of community examples in McMillan's revisit, in their collaborative article with Chavis, they assert that the four criteria for a sense of community can be extended to both territorial and relational communities. Chavis and McMillan illustrate their point by providing examples such as a college basketball team, a neighborhood, a youth gang, and a kibbutz. These examples highlight the diverse range of communities and how they can fulfill the criteria for creating a sense of community. Although the authors do not make any propositions about festivals, the definition and theory of sense of community have been applied to festival studies.

Based on an evaluation of four community cultural festivals in the Northern Rivers of Australia, Ros Derrett examines the emergence of a sense of community and the key drivers contributing to the making of influential festivals. To understand how cultural festivals foster a sense of community and place, the author explores the distinctive features of festivals, the roles of their stakeholders, and how different cultures and visitors are included in the festival. The conclusion of these four case studies underlines that creating a sense of community is long-lasting and challenging within the temporary nature of the festival. However, it allows for a prominent and distinctive definition of community identity. It creates beliefs, attitudes, and values with the participation of many stakeholders while underlining the importance of the function of the organizers (Derrett 2003). A study empirically examining the sense of community at festivals shows that individuals with a higher sense of community experience the festivals' social impacts at higher levels (Winkle and Woosnam 2014, 33).

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of sense of community was included in studies examining the relationships that festivals built with their participants due to the online and hybrid organization of festivals and the emergence of new festivals. According to Brunow, film festivals are confronted with the decision to adopt a hybrid or fully online format amidst the pandemic. In this context, she asserts that watch-along can serve as a compelling blueprint for fostering a sense of community and inspiration. “Hybrid or online festival editions also offer a chance for those queer and LGBT+ audience members, especially young ones who live either too far away in the countryside or have not yet come out. Going hybrid would also allow these groups to be part of a community.” (Brunow 2020, 339).

While Brunow argues that online and hybrid festivals have both advantages and disadvantages, Richards and Pacella concur with a similar viewpoint, highlighting the significance of collective film-watching experiences in fostering a sense of community. However, they also acknowledge the existence of various barriers, such as in-person participation, encompassing social, financial, travel, and health-related obstacles. Still, they assert that “The adoption of a hybrid festival represents a shift towards a more audience-friendly approach, aligning with one of Mark Peranson's (2008) envisioned models of ideal festivals.” (Richards and Pacella 2022, 25).

!f Istanbul, the focus of this thesis, was exchanging some of its programmed films with various NGOs and film clubs in Turkey and abroad through an online database about a decade before the COVID-19 pandemic. These organizations screened the films simultaneously in their cities and then connected online to the festival's screening in Istanbul to participate in Q&As. In this way, audiences in other cities could not only watch the movies for free of charge but also interact with the audience and film crews in the movie theater in Istanbul. Participation in the festival was therefore decoupled from its spatial limitations. The festival directors confirmed that this was not an attempt to take !f Istanbul to other cities, but to create a large community of !f People, trying to bring together film enthusiasts online. The festival's position, which prioritizes both the business that organizes the premieres and the audience that tries to bring these premieres to the audience outside Istanbul for free, was working together on a collaborative effort to form a community.

3.3. Reflections on Community in Film Festivals Context

Even before they were called as such, film festivals were organized as community events. Asserting that the ephemeral nature of film festivals refers to the traveling film screenings at fairs, carnivals, and similar festivities in the pre-distribution era, de Valck argues that "the name film festival was directly inspired by the wide-spread practice of community festivals through which nations, regions, or ethnic groups could support and confirm essential cultural identities" (de Valck 2007, 93). As they exist today, festivals, whatever their scale, are public spaces where multiple groups or actors come together. Not just a spectacle for the audience, festivals are places where contemporary film production and distribution systems meet. A-list festivals, where film markets come to the fore, also feature an expansion in the groups of actors actively participating in festivals.

Moreover, a significant number of the individuals who attend these festivals also attend other festivals on the same scale and become part of a large international group of film professionals. While talking about the international film circuit, de Valck mentions the existence of an international film community but adds that, for instance, film critics are a sub-community (2007, 156). The growing and expanding composition of film festivals implies a different community or communities than the one we used to refer to as the first film festivals. The branching structures of A-list festivals and their different types of participation and accreditation options complicate the notion of a single and solid community. Different professional groups, such as filmmakers, distributors, and producers, usually meet at industry events and markets, if there are any. In contrast, film critics meet in the press room, again if there are any, and cinephiles, festival-goers, or the local community of the festival mostly meet in movie theaters.

When discussing film festival participation and the term community in particular, it is essential to consider the differences in how festivals cater to international, national, and local audiences and stakeholders and note that some festivals target specific communities or demographic groups (de Valck 2016a, 5). Festivals targeting these specific communities or demographic groups are often referred to as identity-based festivals, or with the suffixes "based", "centered", and "led" attached to the term community. If we

are talking about the existence of an international community in festivals, doesn't the origin of the word imply that every festival is essentially a celebration of community?

The term (international) film community appears in many contributions to film festival studies. Turan's (2002) work refers to the community in different ways and senses: the Taos Land Grant Award is mentioned in relation to the festival's aim to create a filmmaking community, while the Sarajevo and Havana Film Festivals highlight the presence of films that address the most tormented dilemmas of the international political community. While classifying festivals in terms of their power to create business, geopolitical and aesthetic agendas, Turan does not omit to mention the existence of an international film community. In the last part, he turns to his own experiences and points to belief in the film as the adhesive of this community (Turan 2002, 180). Here, the existence of an international community united by the film, regardless of their agenda, comes to the foreground. de Valck (2007) reminds us that this international film community existed even before the festivals and that they enthusiastically welcomed the first film festival. Although it is not explicitly stated whom this community consists of and how it took form, de Valck argues that the ubiquity of film festivals in their current form results from programming that serves a niche community of film lovers who regularly visit festivals (de Valck 2007, 104). In other words, festivals have developed and entered a mutually beneficial relationship with this niche film-lover community. However, it is less clear whether this so-called niche film lovers is the international film community, which is often associated with professionals connected through networking. Kredell is more skeptical of the festival community, noting that they come together yearly at "business model" festivals (Kredell 2013, 589).

Nevertheless, we may refer to a community that relates to film in professional and non-professional ways and has come together with an understanding that prioritizes film. Stevens argues that film festivals resist categorizations and that in the common cluster of film screenings, there are festivals that present films that are differentiated by genres, presentation formats, and lengths (more in line with Turan's definition of festivals with aesthetic agendas), and festivals that cater on different types of audiences such as "general public, specialized communities, cinephiles, industry, markets" (Stevens 2016, 91) which is more in line with Turan’s definition of festivals with business or geopolitical agendas.

Despite different categorizations and attempts to put festivals in different boxes, they seem intrinsically linked to the concept of community.

Therefore, the international film community can be defined with a broad and open-ended definition, such as the community of people who preceded the film. It is even possible to talk about a festival-going community prioritizing film festivals. Even in the presence of such a community, we cannot argue that the term community-based or community-centered, which is mentioned in the literature as a kind of branch of film festivals, has no legitimacy. At the same time, we need to purge the term of its boundary-drawing connotation, which distances other festivals as not being community festivals. Moreover, this concept, which can help us perceive intra-festival relations, can pave the way for event productions to benefit the community and build up experience. It may also provide another perspective from which to understand the unique structures of festivals. Talking about the Melbourne Film Festival, Stevens (2016) explains that it was shaped by the efforts of amateurs who came together both territorially and relationally through film, that it had a grassroots community orientation, and that in the following years, it was designed to appeal to a more elitist community and ceased to "be community-based (Stevens 2016, 46). Irvine, on the other hand, reads the enactment of a "community-centered" festival through a practice-based lens, highlighting continuity and the importance of organization between communities and the broader institutional context (Irvine 2015). Examining the queer film festivals, Richards states that grassroots screenings organized by community activists have transformed into commercially motivated organizations and underlines that community-based organizations have undergone a neoliberal transformation by attempting to become elite film institutions, and this transformation applies to most community-prioritizing events. Hence, rather than putting festivals with similar values and priorities into specific boxes, it is worth examining this terminology as it can help us consider their characteristics holistically.

3.4. Community-Based Film Festivals and Beyond

As festivals, even in their most primitive form, have functioned to bring people together for centuries, we might think that they are intrinsically linked to the term community. However, it remains evident that we cannot refer to every group of people coming

together as a community. Biaett's definition of community festivals aligns with Gusfield's (1975) distinction between territorial and relational communities. Those themed occurrences are "produced to bring people either living in a defined area or sharing common interests […] while giving rise to the social capital, a sense of place, and the well-being of its stakeholders." (Biaett 2014, 1054). Considering this definition, it becomes difficult to pinpoint what distinguishes community-based film festivals from other film festivals. Would it be enough for a festival to have programming and side events that attract an already-formed community to make it a community-based festival? Or can every festival that prioritizes local participation in a small city be considered a community-based festival?

de Valck claims that those festivals “can also be referred to as “identity-based festivals” because the thematic selection of films programmed for these festivals is made with an explicit interest in engaging identity questions and representational issues that concern specific communities and groups.” (de Valck 2016a, 3). However, in the case of festivals, descriptive terms should not be taken as exclusive identifiers. Moreover, our identities are now more layered, and this identity-based definition may seem to be trying to pull our identities into a single layer. de Valck adds that identity-based, activist, or even "social concern" festivals might quickly overlap. Rastegar (2016) divides festivals according to mission and stakes, saying that industry-based festivals appeal to a broad audience by creating an extensive repository of films that film professionals have not yet seen. On the other hand, “community-based festivals, often structured around race, gender, nationality, sexuality, or genre, offer spaces where people otherwise marginalized within the larger film industry can share cultural representations and reflections with like-minded people.” (Rastegar 2016a, 187).

The reason why community festivals are often drawn to identity-based definitions can be read historically through the generally politicized period of the 1960s and a series of new social movements that provided the cultural context that paved the way for the establishment of various identity-based festivals in the following decade. In the following years, the rise of diaspora and ethnic-based festivals, which can be associated with

imagined communities, were also considered under identity-based festivals (Loist 2016, 57).

Considering that many different definitions can be used for a festival, we can infer that the aims and motivations of a festival are not monolithic. Therefore, we must consider that film festivals that prioritize community, even if they are defined differently as community-based, community-run, community-centered, or even community-level, do not have this as their sole purpose and motivation. Because, after all, there is “no single community or sphere that delineates the commingled actions of intense festival programs of films, panels, press conferences, and socializing” (C. H.-Y. Wong 2011, 159). Therefore, when we talk about community festivals, we need to consider both the unique nature of the festivals and how much they contribute to community building or reinforcement. Focusing not only on the festivals that we can define as community festivals but also on what other festivals are doing for this cause can give us new perspectives.

Clarke and Jepson argue that a thriving community festival should keep the community at the center of all cultural production processes and ensure that the communities cultures are understood and become evident throughout the festival, underlining the core role of the organizers (Clarke and Jepson 2011). Like many festivals, community-based festivals are not naturally immune to hierarchy and comprise complex power relations. Moreover, trying to cultivate a community ultimately serves as a mechanism to protect and sustain the festival itself (Irvine 2015, 155–56). Adongo and Kim ask the crucial question: “Whose festival is it anyway?”. Surveying festival stakeholders at six local community festivals in Ghana, they conclude that festival organizers have the highest level of power, urgency, and legitimacy (Adongo and Kim 2018). Póvoa answers the question with, "This festival is ours." While festivals are often promoted as opportunities for community empowerment, the power dynamics within the festival organization can be a barrier to doing so. While the core organizers of the festival in Alter do Chão, Brazil, the focus of the study, face challenges in engaging their local community and fall short of their original plans by promoting community participation in only a limited way, community members raise awareness and agency to resist the exploitative practices perceived to be carried out

by the core organizers of the festival (Póvoa 2023, 209). Community festivals and core organizers must therefore be positioned to listen and meaningfully meet community members' aspirations. Indeed, this should not be restricted to community festivals, which are permeable and challenging to define, but it also applies to festivals that aspire to foster a sense of community. Hence the impetus arose to examine in detail the festival that this thesis focuses on.

Similarly, Roy (2016) focuses on the possibilities of documentaries and festivals to foster a sense of community. Since film festivals seek to provide opportunities for connections between people, ideas, and issues, documentary film festivals have a role in rebuilding the non-commercial public sphere crucial for a vibrant democracy because they allow individuals to learn something new within an exploratory and engaging atmosphere that fosters dialog. (Roy 2016, 77). Nevertheless, many film festivals nowadays host documentary sections; could we consider them a chance for community building and the allocation of public space? The collective ritual and networking opportunities of the festivals that Roy mentions contribute to building a sense of community and might be a possibility for many festivals. Moreover, the strength of film festivals in creating a sense of community is not only in screening films but also in offering events, educational opportunities, or celebrations that provide opportunities for social interaction. The social interactions that provide opportunities for cross-pollination that Andruske and Noble mention, “where people begin to change or plant seeds for social change towards others, themselves, and structures.” (Andruske and Noble 2006, 3).

Therefore, this thesis traces the steps taken by a festival that, at first glance, cannot be characterized as a community festival to create a sense of community. The aim is to question whether this first glance might be misleading and how much attention the festival pays to create social capital, a sense of belonging, and the well-being of its stakeholders. In doing so, it focuses on the festival's community-building strategies in a holistic manner, from its programming to its extra-filmic events, from how it defines itself to how it communicates with its participants. While placing it in its historical context, it aims to reveal its unique position among Turkish film festivals. Beyond the feeling of belonging

to a community that emerges from a very personal place, it aims to produce a commentary on the significance and relevance of fostering community within film festivals.

4. !F ISTANBUL INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL

!f[4] Istanbul held its first edition under the title AFM International Independent Film Festival in January 2002 at Beyoğlu Fitaş AFM Cinemas. Meanwhile, Turkey, struggling with economic problems due to hyperinflation since the beginning of the new century, was hit by a financial crisis only a year ago. In February 2001, following a National Security Council meeting, the Prime Minister made a public statement announcing a state crisis, stating that the President had thrown a booklet of the constitution at him during the discussion (Bursalı 2021). The repercussions were significant and caused a dramatic downturn in the markets. The aftermath was still reverberating a year later. Despite the initial conditions, the festival sold around 30,000 tickets and attracted a crowd of 20,000 people in its first year. During an interview with *Variety* on the festival's first edition, Pelin Turgut, one of the co-directors, revealed how they faced considerable skepticism when initially pitched the project. Many people were commenting on the country's significant economic turmoil, with high unemployment rates and the devaluation of the country's currency, says Turgut (Horst 2002, 5).

Despite initial skepticism, the festival raised funding from well-known companies such as Hugo Boss, local intermediary Ata Online, and ticketing site Biletix (Turkish Ticketmaster) within its first edition. Turgut (2002) states that they offered world-class films that would attract a unique community, thus creating a one-of-a-kind opportunity for many brands to establish a direct relationship with their consumer group (2002, 5). The AFM Cinema Chain, the festival's namesake, promised its support for the project as the primary sponsor and partner of the festival. The company had committed to standing behind the festival even if it generated no profit in its rookie season. In fact, the idea for such a festival came from AFM, who reached out to Pelin Turgut and Serra Ciliv, two 25-year-old women who were organizing underground events like raves under the name of OrientNation in Istanbul - and requested that they develop a project. Ciliv says that back

[4] "!f" is an abbreviation for independent film.

then, their initial efforts to arrange alternative cultural and artistic events and to have alternative fun led them to throw these underground parties in unusual venues. Therefore, when AFM approached them to create a festival, they were already well-connected with Istanbul's most quirky and audacious figures in the cultural scene and asked them to design the festival's logo, posters, name, and so on (Hacızade 2015). The project, which began with this collective effort and a small team, also needed to offer something alternative.

It was not only the festival's creators' interest in alternative fare. According to Turgut, there was a considerable appetite for alternative fare in Istanbul. Over half of the population was under twenty-five, and the festival filled this niche (Horst 2002, 5). The creators expressed in numerous interviews that they were composed of a young team looking for independent, alternative, and young cinema. Summarizing the cinema they sought, these words also constituted the festival's self-identification. Looking at the Australian film festival landscape, Stevens (2016) says that the first festivals began with a do-it-yourself approach and an appetite for all forms of cinema; such was the beginning of !f. "Organised by enthusiasts for enthusiasts, these events attained their own characters, which were informed by the needs of an audience interested in gaining access to a wider variety of films and engaging with these works as art from an early stage." (Stevens 2016, 46).

One might ask, then, what motivated such a festival, a first of its kind in Turkey, to be organized by a movie theater chain that screens mainstream films most of the year? AFM was Turkey's most prominent movie theater chain in the early 2000s, with 87 theaters in 7 provinces. In the third edition catalog of the festival, the cinema chain states that it actively supports the development of alternative cinema culture in Turkey as well as popular cinema (*3. AFM Bağımsız Filmler Festivali* 2004). Although the catalog says that they have been operating since 1965, Fitaş and Dünya Cinemas (later known as AFM Fitaş) were built by subsidiaries of Ipek Film, one of Turkey's pioneers in the movie theater management, distribution, and production sectors (Özyılmaz 2020, 707–9). Not only screenings but also events; for instance, Sinematek was organizing their events there, and concerts took place in these two theatres, which could accommodate more than two

thousand people. The theaters, finding themselves in a financial crunch in the eighties, were overtaken by AFM at the end of the decade.

As the new century approaches, due to similar concerns, AFM redesigned its halls and transformed them into Turkey's largest megaplex with ten relatively small salons. Influential in this transformation, companies such as UIP, opening offices in Turkey in the mid-nineties and distributing American majors, made annual agreements with the theatre operators. Entering the Turkish market without intermediaries and serving as a locomotive for renovating Turkish movie theaters, these companies established great control over the market (Vitrinel 2020, 233). The renovation of halls involves the division of large halls into multiple halls. This multiplexisation, Erkılıç (2009) argues, has occurred due to globalization, and led to the destruction of the cultural tapestry, also affecting cinema-going practices and the audience profile. On the eve of the new millennium, while the young audience that has grown up with television through popular films is filling the theatres, alternatively, festivals, cultural centers, and home cinemas have become the meeting places of cinephiles (Erkılıç 2009, 150–52). Of course, these should not be considered as entirely separate groups. It would be erroneous to conclude that cinephiles are not young, as an audience survey conducted by the Istanbul Film Festival in its tenth year revealed that three-quarters of its audience was between 20-30 years old (Uçansu 2012, 223). Therefore, it seemed logical for the theater operators to organize such a festival. Including a 10-day independent film festival in their regular program of mainstream films would increase the number of visitors and diversify their audience profile.

The collaboration between the chain and the production company of the co-directors, which is the first and unique initiative in Turkey, would grant the festival more freedom of movement compared to other festivals organized by foundations and municipalities. However, at the same time, the course of the festival was directly affected by AFM's increasing presence in shopping malls, its acquisition in 2009 by Mars Entertainment Group, the owner of Cinebonus Theater Chain, with whom AFM shared half of the market share, and the purchase of this group, which owned most of the cinemas in shopping malls, by CJ CGV, the largest multiplex cinema chain in South Korea, over the following

years. AFM's multiple acquisitions would not only remove AFM from the festival's name, but the new managing group would also acquire the rights to the festival with subsequent buyouts, as per the agreement made between AFM and the production company of the co-directors in the initial years of the festival. The process concluded in 2018, the second year after CJ CGV had taken over when it suddenly and quietly dismissed the co-directors who had served since the festival's inception.

Following the dismissal of the festival's creators and co-directors Serra Ciliv and Pelin Turgut without justification, a group of filmmakers, musicians, writers, and artists who identify themselves as !f people, has launched an "!f-style" petition[5]. In the open letter for the petition, the signatories raised a series of questions to the CEO of CGV Mars Entertainment Group, expressing their deep concern whether the festival, which for seventeen years has been home to the films they have produced or followed with interest can continue to maintain its identity. Underlining that the festival created a creative space that nourishes hope and togetherness, they demanded that the spirit of the festival be preserved. The campaign suggested that a company should not own the festival. Instead, it should be handed over to a foundation or association, including the co-directors among its founders. Meanwhile, many users on social media were voicing similar concerns. Most of these messages expressed worries about the festival's capacity to preserve the spirit of multiplicity, boldness and creativity without its founding co-directors.

A week later, CGV Mars stated they were sensitively following cinephiles' comments and thoughts in the press and social media. The group claimed they have held the festival under their brand for many years. It asserted that the festival had reached its current position thanks to cinephiles, regardless of any individual, underestimating the contributions of the co-directors to the festival. Underlining that the festival would continue by preserving its spirit and basic philosophy, they declared their intention to prepare a more robust and dynamic festival, and the festival's scope will be enriched with a focus on local films. The statement ended as follows: "As CGV Mars Entertainment Group, we would like to state that we will regularly inform the public about all

[5] !f-style Petition: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSexlysCe9d47iq7u8LcasGe9e81JDK-g__6aBMkJZBBv_VGew/viewform?fbzx=-8984115144930435000 Accessed on 15 May 2023.

developments regarding the festival in the upcoming period and that we will continue to contribute to the development of the cinema culture and industry." (*BirGün* 2018).

However, the subsequent process was not operated transparently. The entire festival team was changed from top to bottom. The festival, held every year in February, was rescheduled to May, then postponed to September. However, the eighteenth edition of the festival was the first and only one organized by the new team. The festival has been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas the festival has been using online technologies for nearly ten years, reaching 50 different provinces worldwide and bringing the finest examples of Turkish cinema to international film professionals through FestivalScope. The dismissal of the entire team, not just the co-directors, must have hindered the transmission of this know-how. Alternatively, organizing an online festival might also have been thrown aside for being unprofitable for the theatre chain. The last announcement about the festival's future was made on 21 January 2021 on Twitter, where the festival is followed by more than a half million users, not only the most followed film festival in Turkey but also worldwide. Although no announcement has been made that the festival has been completely terminated, !f has not occurred for almost four years. Those who identified themselves as !f people, launched a petition, and raised their voices on social media were justified. The chain copied the text written by the signatories and presented it as a manifesto on the festival's spirit on its website. However, despite this appropriation, the chain has failed to uphold and preserve that spirit. Although CGV Mars promised to maintain its close relationship with !f's stakeholders, it failed to deliver on this promise. However, a quick search of the festival's name yields numerous instances of users sharing memories of the event. These posts indicate that the festival's spirit is embraced not by the movie theater chain but by its participants. Nevertheless, both the chain and the participants concur on one fundamental aspect: !f was transcending the boundaries of a film festival.

Indeed, !f was perhaps more than a film festival. In their farewell letters, the co-directors state that the festival created a powerful world of meaning: "Each edition, we wanted to recreate it as a platform that does not separate cinema and activism; we met films that tried new things and covered all colors." (*BirGün* 2018). In an interview they gave for the

last edition, when asked about the festival's success, they stated that the reason for this success was that they did not begin the festival to be successful. "We set out with the question of whether we could organize the kind of event we wanted to have fun and participate in. At that time, we did not know how to make a festival, how to be successful, but we had a feeling that we could make a heartfelt, very from us, very young festival." Mustafa Uzuner, the edition's program organizer, added, "I think there is also the fact that !f created a community, a sense of solidarity." (*Filmloverss* 2018).

The following part of the thesis aims to trace the sense of community and solidarity mentioned by the program curator by reading the outputs produced by the festival, from the programming of the festival to the side events, catalogs, and posters to the use of social media, based on the four criteria for creating a sense of community proposed by Chavis and McMillan in 1986. Without analyzing these productions individually in separate sections, their compliance with the four criteria will be discussed together. Nevertheless, the following part, when talking about membership, will primarily focus on the festival's self-identification and programming, while when talking about influence, it will focus on the organizational structure and especially the process of involving the festival's stakeholders in its curative process. Under the reinforcement, the relationship and contribution of the festival with the industry and stakeholders will be discussed, while shared emotional connection will highlight how the festival's ephemera and side events are constructed in this regard.

4.1. Membership: !f Spirit

Chavis and McMillan state that membership, the first criterion for creating a sense of community, is about boundaries. Rather than a means of excluding a person from a community, these boundaries imply the drawing of boundaries that allow a person to feel belonging to that community. "The boundaries provide members with the emotional safety necessary for needs and feelings to be exposed and for intimacy to develop." (Mcmillan and Chavis 1986, 9). Therefore, this sub-section discusses the strategies the festival follows regarding self-identification and the creation of its concepts (!f Film, !f People, !f Spirit) to discuss how membership is built.

Throughout the festival's inaugural season, the co-founders and directors, Pelin Turgut and Serra Ciliv, consistently emphasized the core values of independence, alternative perspectives, and youthfulness. These concepts were underpinned by the fact that the directors were indeed very young - they were 25 - and Turkish movie-goers were likewise young (Erkılıç 2009, 27). Research conducted by AC Nielsen Turkey for Fida Film indicates that 44.5% of the movie-goers in 2002, the year the festival was initiated, were between the ages of 18-24. Nine of every ten movie-goers were 18-39 (Boydak and Çilingir 2007). Moreover, the founders believed there was a hunger among young audiences to see alternative and independent films (Horst 2002, 5). One might think that the festival underlined alternativeness with its "Option E" section, which contends films that take unconventional approaches to familiar themes; however, some of the directors whose films were shown in this section have already screened their previous films at the Istanbul Film Festival, which had celebrated its 20th year in 2001. What the festival signified by an alternative perspective was revealed in the Rainbow Films section, which focused on gay and lesbian cinema[6] for the first time in Turkey, and in the Music and Film section, which brought together film and music. Themed parties and side events complemented these sections.

On the one hand, it is an inevitable consequence of the changes that film festivals have undergone globally. According to de Valck, the worldwide dissemination of the film festival phenomenon and the escalating rivalry among festivals during the 1980s and 1990s necessitated a crucial transformation of the festival format. "The boundaries between art and entertainment, distinction and spectacle, began to blur again. Various types of films use the festivals for value addition in a global market, whether they are targeted for a mainstream or niche audience." (de Valck 2007, 129). *Variety*'s Carol Horst reports that the festival is filling a niche with its screenings of gay and lesbian cinema (Horst 2002, 5). It would take more than a decade for the Istanbul Film Festival to include a similar section. The festival does not set out to rival the Istanbul Film Festival but to bring authenticity to fill a niche gap. Likewise, when the festival showed music clips and videos, also first in Turkey, it was criticized in various quarters that these products had no

[6] The initial title of gay and lesbian films was later updated to LGBTIQ+ films.

cinematic value. Pelin Turgut recalls being also criticized for showing films other than 35 mm, saying, "We had no dogmas. We wanted to create a space to show every work we believe in its value without getting stuck in conventions."[7] Turgut also expressed that their lack of experience in film festival organizing possibly gave them a sense of freedom to break some conventions.

Film critic Atilla Dorsay reports that the first edition of the festival was a success, and it became clear that Istanbul was a city that could handle several more festivals. The columnist confirms that the festival's emphasis on youth also resonated with the audience. During the inaugural year, he says, the halls became an arena for cinema, art, and the exchange of ideas among young people. According to the columnist, it was reported in the press that a speaker at one of the festival panels referred to the Istanbul Film Festival as an old "granny" festival. "In response, the director of the IFF, dear Hülya Uçansu, joked with her usual sweetness, 'That old granny is me.' However, later on, the directors of !f clarified that no one had made such a statement, deeming it a complete fabrication." (Dorsay 2002). The origins of this rumor remain undisclosed; however, the reference to granny and the festival's emphasis on youth suggest a significance that transcends mere age. After all, as mentioned in the previous sections, in the early 2000s, Turkish festival-goers were relatively young. According to a study conducted in 2018, over 50% of festival attendees are still so young, individuals aged between 16 and 25 years old (TRT Akademi 2018, 245). Nevertheless, given the old granny festival analogy to the IFF, it is worth examining the reasons behind the characterization of !f as an arena for young people.

Further examination of the festival's programming and underlying themes may provide an understanding of what was implied by "youthfulness". Dorsay reports that first films, experimental endeavors, and "different sexual adventures" were watched with interest throughout the festival (Dorsay 2002). Horst describes the festival as ground-breaking, "highlighting the edgiest, most controversial independent films around." (Horst 2002, 5). While examining the coverage of the festival in the Turkish press, it becomes evident that there is confusion surrounding the definition of independent films. Including "independent" in the festival's name sparks discussions about the meaning of

[7] Pelin Turgut, online interview by author, June, 16, 2023.

independence in filmmaking and extends to other art forms. *Milliyet*'s Culture&Art supplement had a full-page article titled "The independence of art," in which experts from different art branches are asked for their opinions. In the small corner dedicated to the festival, it is pointed out that some of the directors whose films will be screened at the festival have already had their previous films presented at the IFF and that the term "independent" should not be intimidating (*Milliyet Kültür&Sanat* 2002, 15).

Cumhuriyet's Gamze Akdemir finds the solution by asking the festival's special invitee Hal Hartley, in her own words, one of the masters of independent cinema, about the concept of independence. She inquires whether the definition of independent cinema encompasses a political mission or missions and seeks the director's perspective on this matter. Hartley answers: "The word independent in English does not convey what we do in the name of independent cinema all that well. The important thing in this genre is to act with an open mind, with the idea that you can tell the audience what you want to do in the minimum amount of time and cost by using technology and all other means." (Akdemir 2002, 15).

Milliyet's Alin Taşçıyan, on the other hand, went to the heart of the matter and asked Serra Ciliv, one of the co-founders, not about independent cinema but about what the festival understands by independent cinema and why such a name was preferred. Ciliv states that they thought about what independent film might mean in Turkey, where no big production studios exist, and every film can be considered independent. She argues that the concept of independence is not only about Hollywood and America, nor about financing and that the director's choices regarding narrative, content, and actors should be at the forefront of the definition of independent film. "The word independent in the festival's name is important because it underlines the films made to say something more personal, heartfelt, unusual, and sometimes more creative rather than appealing to larger crowds" (Ciliv quoted in Taşçıyan 2001, 2). The definitions that Ciliv employed to describe the films they curated originated from a highly subjective standpoint. However, during the festival's rookie season, the founders handled many tasks together, from programming to organizing, and the films they curated catered to the tastes of their core team.

According to Roya Rastegar, there needs to be a clearer understanding of the meaning of independent film within the broader film culture. The role of festivals leads to various contradictions in programming approaches (Rastegar 2016b, 187). Serra Ciliv confirms this confusion. In an interview she gave for the last edition, she says that in the first five years of the festival, they were asking, "Yay, we are having a festival, should we have a red carpet?" and then they realized that having a red carpet was not their concern at all. They really caught the spirit of the festival on the way. (*Filmloverss* 2018). But what was this spirit? To grasp the essence of this spirit, I directed my attention toward the petition that emerged after the festival's founding team's expulsion. Ultimately, McMillan introduced a revision to the initial community aspect, namely membership, with the addition of "spirit" a decade later. In doing so, he elucidates that communities imbued with spirit foster a sense of emotional security, fostering an environment conducive to self-disclosure and cultivating intimate connections (McMillan 1996, 315).

Within the text, the signatories assert that over 17 years, the festival has established a set of fundamental principles that have come to be known as the "!f Spirit. They affirm that the festival has forged and upheld an independent, inventive, and inclusive framework that embraces creative experimentation while adhering to international standards. The signatories also express their concerns that the festival will continue along the same lines without its founding directors, Serra Ciliv and Pelin Turgut. The inception of the festival's spirit can be attributed to the concerted efforts of this dynamic duo, who became synonymous with the festival itself over the years. In fact, the co-founders initially fostered a community through a series of underground events before the festival's establishment. These events, where a few friends invited others, gradually expanded into a community. Exceptionally well attended by Istanbul's culture and art milieu, OrientNation created a network that would later serve to expand the festival. Serra Ciliv aptly expressed the benefit of these events on the festival.

> We were merely a phone call away from anyone interested in instigating change. Our focus extended beyond simply collecting films; instead, it encompassed a genuine desire to unite productions that yearned for an alternative world. Each participant was an individual we genuinely

> aspired to befriend. Our closeness and accessibility to those people played a pivotal role in amplifying the festival's reach.[8]

The "change" the festival founder refers to here has also become apparent over the years. For instance, neither the number of films nor the festival's categories have ever remained the same, and with each edition, some new sections have been added, some have changed names, and some have endured for a long time. The longest-running section of the festival, Hit Films, which includes films that have won awards at festivals such as Toronto, Cannes, Locarno, etc., has been one of the most popular sections of the festival, even though its name has changed. In contrast, the aforementioned "Option E" has constantly changed and transformed, with many sections focusing on niche topics.

The festival sections typically do not adhere to strict genre boundaries, instead, films are selected based on their relevance to the overarching theme of the section. Those themes were, of course, formed by the films produced that year but also by the current international and local political debates. For instance, in its fourth edition, The Middle East Now! section presents an assortment of short and feature-length films. The introduction of the section notes that the festival aims to bring to the forefront the experiences of regions most affected by the repercussions of the changing global order. The festival's team expressed that the festival has a responsibility to present to its audience these films disrupting the stereotypes of the region and its films (4. AFM Bağımsız Uluslararası Filmler Festivali 2005, 31).

The following year festival announces a newcomer political section: Insiders/Outsiders contends the films that offer a balanced perspective on the mechanics of power by incorporating narratives from the margins - individuals who either resist the system, choose to remain outside of it, or are excluded from it (*5. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali* 2006, 61). On its eight-year festival launches a section called CounterSounds, a curated collection of films exploring music's impact on the emergence of novel subcultures, political movements, and lifestyles worldwide. Another section entitled "The World in 1 Take" pertains to a holistic and politically charged approach to

[8] Serra Ciliv, online interview with author, May, 11, 2023.

capturing the world in a single uninterrupted shot, alluding to both a spiritual awakening and a form of political dissent (*8. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali* 2009, 67–91) In the subsequent year, the festival achieved a notable milestone by introducing a pioneering initiative in Turkey, including a selection of Kurdish films. This significant undertaking was made possible with the valuable contributions of Mustafa Gündoğdu, who served as the director of the London Kurdish Film Festival at the time. According to Turgut, the festival made sincere efforts to become an "ally" without cultural appropriation.[9]

In its twelfth edition, the festival explains both its position and that of the films it shows through the words it uses on its posters. The terms used in this promotional campaign, with different expressions on each poster, function as a dictionary of the festival's values. Words are chosen harmoniously with the name !f were: Initiative, Confrontative, Collective, Alternative, and Perspective.[10] Subsequently, celebrating its thirteenth anniversary, the festival introduces a competitive section titled "Love & Change." This section aims to unite activist filmmakers from around the globe with a critical perspective on the evolving world. These filmmakers are deeply committed to envisioning an alternative world and believe in the transformative potential of cinematic interventions (Yüksel 2014). The "Love & Change" section represents the tangible manifestation of Ciliv's early vision of "change." As evident, the festival continued to curate films that embraced cutting-edge, bold, and distinctive narratives and storytelling techniques, stimulating political discussions on both local and international levels.

Therefore the festival creates an understanding of diverse perspectives, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and promoting positive social change. The festival aims to cultivate a community of individuals passionate about social and political change, actively engaging in critical discourse and dialogue sparked by the curated films. The festival's focus on films that open up political debates provides a safe place based on shared interests and a common vision for a different world. According to Fırat Yücel, describing !f solely as a platform that connects independent films with audiences would be an inadequate

[9] Turgut, interview.
[10] The Turkish equivalents of all words end with "if": “İnisiyatif, Muhalif, Kolektif, Alternatif, Perspektif.”

representation. Although one cannot claim that !f Istanbul operated independently of market conditions, consumption trends, or capitalist transformations in the city, Yücel states that the festival redefines its "independence" as something that is not static or preserved but continuously reinvented through trial and error. According to him, !f was among the pioneering organizations that recognized the growing interest in independent American films, cult films, and outstanding films by emerging directors following the establishment of private television channels in Turkey.

> However, with the festival's inception by the dynamic duo Pelin Turgut and Serra Ciliv, who garnered the attention of this specific cultural and social segment, the festival never remained stagnant. Rather than simply catering to the preexisting cultural preferences of their target audience, they aspired to expand the "cultural and intellectual world" of these segments. In many ways, !f Istanbul Festival defied the populist formulas adopted by mainstream media organizations. It exhibited its independent stance by adopting a revisionist approach in its film program and its events and accessibility across different geographical areas and social classes (Yücel 2012, 11).

During an interview, when asked about the rivalry with the IFF, Serra Ciliv expressed her belief that Istanbul could accommodate two high-quality festivals, and that there was no need to be concerned about the rivalry. She mentioned that both the festival team and the audience shared a clear understanding and appreciation for what constituted an "!f film." and added: "We are fortunate that many filmmakers also have the concept of a '!f film' in their minds." (Solmaz 2015, 3). While Ciliv stated that there was no need for rivalry, the festival established the boundary that Chavis and McMillan believed was necessary for membership, based on the concept of an "!f film". If individuals were familiar with "!f movies" and embraced the "!f Spirit", they were considered part of the "!f People" community.

4.2. Influence: !f People

The second criterion for a sense of community, influence, is bi-directional. As the community can influence the individual, the individuals need to feel that they influence the community (Mcmillan and Chavis 1986, 10). Revisiting the criteria ten years later, McMillan argues that influence is only possible through trust building. Thus he argues

that for the spirit of community to grow from a spark to a fire, trust must be built, and this trust can only be built when the community addresses and resolves the challenges associated with power distribution. Thus "a community must be able to influence its members, and members must be able to influence the community." (McMillan 1996, 318). “!f People” underlined in their signature campaigns that the festival was based on multivocality. One might ask what kind of influence the audience can have among the decision-makers of a festival.

The festival did not organize a competition with a cash prize until !f Inspired, which started in festival’s seventh edition and was awarded to the most inspiring director. However, from the first year onwards, in the Shorts from Turkey section, the only section of the festival to show films from Turkish Cinema, the festival organized an audience vote. The director, whose short film won the audience award, was granted access to attend screenings at AFM Cinemas free of charge throughout the year. In the first couple of editions, a jury vote was also held in this category, and the director who won the jury prize was entitled to participate in an international festival. After a few editions, the jury prize was abolished because it gave the category a contest-like atmosphere, and only the audience prize remained. This could be considered a project to attract audiences. However, films in this category were screened entirely free of charge.

During an interview for the tenth edition, the journalist asks the co-founders what they pay attention to the most while curating movies. They state that they are open to showing any film with a different, new perspective and taking advice from !f people, a community that grew within a decade (*Milliyet* 2011). Indeed, that year the festival launched an audience vote on its blog, asking its audience to select films that had been screened as part of the festival for ten years. The festival emphasized the importance of including the audience in the curative process and continued implementing this practice. In the twelfth and thirteenth editions, the films to be screened in the !f Music category were again selected by audience voting on the blog, while in the sixteenth edition, the closing film was voted on and selected via Twitter.

In the twelfth edition, the Short Films from Turkey category, which faced difficulties sourcing films during its inaugural year - Serra Ciliv revealed during our interview that they were calling short film directors one by one - implemented an open suggestion system for submissions. Unlike previous years, as of this edition, proposals for Shorts from Turkey were not limited to short film directors or producers but extended to all festival-goers. The festival invited the !f People to suggest short films that are "so !f" (!f İstanbul 2012). Without an application and jury system, but with the suggestions of the short filmmakers and the audience, !f Istanbul compiled and programmed thematic sections, open to all kinds of moving image-based productions of Turkish directors and artists.

Of course, one cannot claim that the festival has maintained a wholly inclusive and audience-oriented approach for seventeen years without a single casualty. In 2011, a group called "!But Madi Götkuşakları"[11] published a statement criticizing the genuineness of the festival's sensitivities. Although stating their excitement about the festival's program, the group issued a statement stating that they do not buy the festival's LGBTI+ sensitivity, which parallels the government's capital-based policies and favors gentrification. One of the festival's main sponsors that year was the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture Agency of Ministry, established in conjunction with Istanbul being designated as the European Capital of Culture by the Council of Europe. The group argued that the project created giant mechanisms that transformed Istanbul under the guise of culture and art and excluded urban poverty and deprivation. The group claimed that the festival reproduced the discourses of the government despite its opposing stance and found it problematic that the festival was funded by the Ministry of Culture, which is complicit in the gentrification of Beyoğlu.

Moreover, the selection of a concert hall in Beyoğlu, known for its discriminatory and prejudiced approach to the LGBTI+ community, as the festival center, along with the high ticket prices for the Rainbow category party, has led the group to question the festival's genuine commitment to LGBTI+ activism. The group claims that the festival, reliant on

[11] The group's name can be translated as "!Big Ass Bitchy Rainbows" from Lubunca, a cant/slang used by the Turkish queer community.

its alignment with the Establishment, tries to embrace the LGBTI+ rights movement with insincere sensitivity regarding the public image. "It simultaneously commercializes and exploits every aspect of the rainbow spectrum within the entertainment industry. Thus the festival's policies primarily cater to a select few elite LGBTI+ individuals rather than addressing the community's needs and struggles." (*Kaos GL* 2011).

Serra Ciliv, whom I reminded of this declaration in our interview, says it was remarkably well written and created a high-quality reflection ground for them. Ciliv mentioned her acquaintance with some of the people involved in drafting the declaration. While some festival team members were saddened that the issues addressed in the statement were being communicated via the Internet rather than direct communication, Ciliv believes that this was a consequence of the importance the festival places on fostering dialogue. Only through such critiques, she says, could they look at what they were producing from the outside and realize their errors.[12] In a similar vein to the group above, especially in the last two editions of the festival, the festival's independence and alternativeness were also criticized due to the festival's acquisition by the monopolizing CGV Mars Group in Turkey. Reflecting on creating public space by festivals, Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong discusses how festivals that define themselves as alternative festivals, such as !f, use public spaces and create counter-public spaces.

> In general, while the A-list festivals evoke the classic bourgeois public sphere, with fissures of contradictions and counterpublics erupting from time to time, alternative film festival organizers and participants often see them- selves as explicitly embodying counterpublic spheres [...] Even so, such festivals have a mode of production whose visibility and analysis are just as important as the questions we pose to the more bourgeois events. Even subversives have official supporters, sponsors, and partners (C. H. Y. Wong 2016, 91).

After their dismissal, festival co-directors were asked about the impact of a contradictory situation between their collaboration with civil society and strong ties with investment groups and high-profile sponsors. In fact, the festival's independence has been criticized since its early years when it started with the initial support of a movie theater chain. However, over seventeen years, the festival's brand went through two subsequent

[12] Ciliv, interview.

acquisitions and eventually became part of a group that heavily invested in the Turkish cinema sector to monopolize it. The festival team confirms that the acquisition of AFM Cinemas by Mars Entertainment Group has had a positive impact on the festival. Nor does anyone hide that a bank's sponsorship led to the launch of the Love&Change competition, which brings together activists from different platforms. Using the analogy of walking on tightrope, Pelin Turgut says that organizing a festival is a constant negotiation process with different stakeholders. She underlines that !f's priority in this process is creating an ecosystem accommodating all participants.[13]

McMillan argues that for influence to flourish, knowing where community members stand in the balance of power is essential. Therefore, members have to ask about power: "Who has it? When do they have it? If not present in some members, when don't they have it? For the spirit of community to survive beyond its first initial spark, the community must solve the problems arising from the allocation of power" (McMillan 1996, 318). Although the festival involves participants as much as possible in the curative and organizational process, it does not seem to have sufficiently informed the community about sponsorships and the festival's brand rights. Therefore, the sudden dismissal of the festival's core team came as a shock to the community. A significant part of the festival's participants was unaware that there is a decision-making power beyond the festival team and directors, who directly communicate with them and prioritize dialogue. Participants' proactive actions, such as voicing their opinions to decision-makers and organizing petitions, may indicate that the festival achieved some level of influence, albeit not entirely. This suggests that no matter how much the festival prioritizes the community, it must still endeavor to make power dynamics explicit. Based on the starting point of this thesis, it can be argued that festivals that occupy an ambiguous space in the duality of business and audience festivals should pay special attention to allocating trust and being more accountable in forming a sense of community.

[13] Turgut, interview.

4.3. Reinforcement: Do-It-Yourself

The third component of a sense of community is broadly the satisfaction of needs, which Chavis and McMillan call reinforcement "Reinforcement as a motivator of behavior is a cornerstone in behavioral research, and it is obvious that for any group to maintain a positive sense of togetherness, the individual-group association must be rewarding for its members." (Mcmillan and Chavis 1986, 12).

As mentioned in previous chapters, feature film production in Turkey was hovering around the twenties when the festival was initiated. The festival has never hidden the fact that it is looking for emerging cinema. Therefore, programming short films from Turkey was a unique opportunity to meet emerging directors and new forms of film production in the country. Although the festival had to contact many short filmmakers to fill this category in its first year, it has proliferated in the following years. During the interview, Uğur Yüksel, the festival's Press and Public Relations Coordinator highlighted that in nearly every edition, their primary focus during the preparation process is on short films and their curation rather than prioritizing popular movies that will have their premiere in Turkey.[14] As the festival was celebrating its fifteenth anniversary, it proudly announced that 32 filmmakers, whose shorts were previously programmed, screened their feature-length films in the following years.

It was important for the festival to create space for short films, to show them on the big screen and in theaters with decent screening facilities while making their screenings free and accessible. During a panel discussion, Ferit Katipoğlu and Cem Öztüfekçi, two short filmmakers, expressed that they established the Short Film Collective of Turkey during the tenth edition of !f and are currently working towards its organization. Katipoğlu adds that the festival has provided a unique screening possibility (Göl 2012, 231–41). Similarly, Berke Baş, co-director of the documentary *Bağlar*, screened in the festival's fifteenth edition, said, "We wanted !f for the screening. !f has a young audience; they provide two screenings and a big hall (Ünal 2017, 210). According to Yüksel, they aim to emphasize and prioritize short films and documentaries as the festival's focal point.

[14] Uğur Yüksel, interview by author, Istanbul, May, 24, 2023.

“Typically, these genres are considered secondary sections in more prominent festivals. However, at !f, we aimed to elevate these films' value and screening opportunities, maximizing their visibility and importance within the festival.” [15]

The shorts section has also played a vital role in the expansion and evolution of the festival. The festival's expansion to the Asian continent was also with Shorts from Turkey. In its fourth year, the festival screened short films at KargArt in Kadıköy, again free of charge (The following year, the festival was to be held both in the Asian side of Istanbul and in Ankara). In addition to screening short films and documentaries under favorable conditions, the festival also aimed to bring them to a broader audience. With Ericsson's sponsorship in the sixth edition, Shorts from Turkey formed its sub-sections. Underlining that the festival aims to provide the opportunity for Turkish shorts to reach movie theaters, the festival also organized activities to bring the directors and the audience together after each screening.

An instant comment feature is introduced to make these encounters more interactive among the audience, and the messages sent with the help of a code projected after each film are published on the festival's website. This enabled the audience and filmmakers to exchange ideas with those they might have yet to meet in the theater or at gatherings. Besides, the videos taken by the audience during the festival were also invited to the festival’s 8th edition documentary with the motto "There is abundance in plurality; we welcome any voice and color" (*8. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali* 2009, 220). The festival also provided a platform for those who want to show their short videos and films through a separate website. If you still need to figure out your films, the festival has a solution for that, too: It trashes your films. Motivated by the lack of film criticism in the short film arena, the festival and film magazine *Altyazı* set up a workshop to encourage debate with short filmmakers with the following announcement: “Do your friends have nothing but praise for your shorts? Does everybody say "cool", but you feel something is missing? Bring your film and let's watch, discuss and criticize it together. Allow us to trash your film! Films will be viewed by the director, crew and any participants, and followed by a discussion.” (2009, 218)

[15] Yüksel, interview.

The festival was inviting its audience not only to share their films but also their experiences. The Human Library, which will start in the seventh edition, envisioned “a new way of sharing experiences between those who know and those who are curious. In fact, since its first year, the festival has not organized its events and workshops exclusively for film, and has ensured that the physical and digital function together. The digitalization of the festival extends beyond the movie theaters with two new online sections on 2009. The festival presents a collection of seminal films on economics, war, and the environment that can be viewed online at festival's website under the title “See for Yourself”. This section, in which open-access "political, rebellious, and yet mind-opening" documentaries, animations, and videos were gathered in three curative sub-sections, intended to extend the festival to the whole year (2009, 211).

The other online section, !f Blog was also a step to extend the festival to a whole year. The blog, available and active the whole year, is where festival organizers candidly share their updates and impressions about the day-to-day progress and preparations for the festival. Unfortunately, we cannot access the blog anymore, yet we would have more information about the internal functioning of film festivals in Turkey if this medium, where festival directors share their day-to-day experiences, had not been shut down. Believing that they should align with the festival's slogan of that particular year, "Do-It-Yourself," the festival team openly shared various insights on the blog that year and subsequent years. These included details about their recent encounter with DCP technology and the bureaucratic procedures involved in importing films into Turkey through customs. The blog page then became an open-sharing platform where the team openly discussed current issues and posted events, extending the festival's activity to the whole year. Under the "Sibling Blogs" section, promotions were made for other blogs producing content on culture and art. In a ground-breaking move for Turkey, the festival extended invitations to online film critics, particularly those new to the scene, granting them press accreditation. Yüksel emphasizes the festival's deep appreciation for independent content creators, highlighting their dedicated efforts to ensure their inclusion.[16]

[16] Yüksel, interview.

Following a similar approach, the festival initiated a project called !f² in collaboration with local cinema clubs and culture and art collectives. This project aimed to establish an alternative distribution and screening platform for individuals who do not have access to film screenings in Istanbul. Ciliv states that their intention was not to bring !f there but rather to explore the possibility of enabling every city and town to have their festival. This transregional initiative marked a significant milestone in the festival's digitalization efforts, enabling outreach and engagement with a diverse audience, encompassing different communities and local participants. It also provided an avenue for the festival to facilitate collective conversations, allowing viewers of the films to follow discussions and pose questions online from any location. The festival announced the project as follows:

> Five of the most eagerly anticipated films of the festival will be screened simultaneously in 15 points across Turkey and in Ramallah (Palestine), Gumru (Armenia), Tbilisi (Georgia) and Tangiers (Morocco) the weekend of February 20-21st. The new project "!f²: Live from Istanbul" will allow the festival to take advantage of new digital screening possibilities to reach out to audiences who do not otherwise have access to these films. Most of these locations do not have cinemas, and those that do rely on mainstream features. Project partners in these cities are unions, NGOs, cultural centers and even a cafe (9. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali 2010, 11).

As the festival turned ten years old, five films from the project reached 7000 people in 25 different cities through the project. Another five films screened at that edition were determined by a poll conducted on the !f Blog. The festival has asked !f people about their favourite films of the past ten editions, and the most voted films had a special screening. !f not only tried to make its audience an active part of the festival, but also hosted free screenings for various NGOs and collectives, such as Sustainable Life Collective, Migration Solidarity Network, Vegan Collective, Amnesty International, where they could both present themselves and show films of their choice. The festival was already organizing various events with associations such as Lambdaistanbul LGBTI+ Solidarity Association, whether related to the film or not. Involving associations and collectives in the curative process of the festival matched its pluralist nature. Ciliv says:

> We articulate two primary objectives. The first is to preserve the festival as a space where individuals can showcase their work, derive inspiration from one another's production, foster hope, initiate fresh discussions, and generate new ideas. The second one is to take care of each other. In times of anxiety, like today, people pause. We have to make sure that we take care of each other as much as possible, which means holding each other's space, showing each other's work, protecting each other. (Estukyan 2018).

In this regard, the festival established in its seventh edition an Independent Distributor Award to reinforce the local film industry. Awarded distributor's film was guaranteed a theatrical release in AFM halls, press, and outdoor promotional support. In its tenth year, the festival hosted the Sundance Film Festival's Film Forward, which promotes cultural dialogue. The same year, a scriptwriters' lab was organized in partnership with the festival, which supported nearly thirty film scripts in eight years. In its fourteenth edition, in collaboration with YAPIMLAB - a platform to exchange filmmaking experiences with young producer candidates - a creative production workshop and pitching platform are established to bring directors and producers together. The festival audience is also welcome to attend these workshops free of charge. That same year, the festival founded the New Film Fund to support feature/medium/short non-fiction films with Anadolu Kültür.

> The New Film Fund sets out with the dream of a world in which all living beings can live together on this planet peacefully. It supports films of solidarity that pave the way for change, adopt human rights in their broadest definition as their principle, and give a voice to minorities. It aims to support stories that display a transformative quality in form and content, narratives that challenge borders between genres, and projects that bring different encounters and experiences to the fore. By creating a platform that encourages diversity and the free expression of a multiplicity of voices, it hopes to enable the development of independent film production in Turkey (“New Film Fund” 2023) .

McMillan noted that a sense of community emerges when a group comes together with vital energy and a trustworthy system of inclusive leadership that instills confidence. As this community develops, its members discover ways to mutually support and enhance both individual and societal well-being mutually, leading to the development of an economy. “A community economy based on shared intimacy, which is implied by the term “sense of community,” represents a social economy.” (McMillan 1996, 321). Of course, the aforementioned "reinforcements" were also necessary for the festival to

sustain itself. Still, with sincere efforts, the festival cared about making its stakeholders a part of the festival and creating a space that would allow them to produce and secure their productions to be seen and heard. It started a trade by sharing its own production practices, hoping to be a guide and trying to make all kinds of productions feel valuable.

4.4. Shared Emotional Connection: !f Unites

Chavis and McMillan argue that a shared emotional connection, partly a shared history, is one of the most essential parts of a community. "It is not necessary that group members have participated in the history in order to share it, but they must identify with it." (Mcmillan and Chavis 1986, 13). The fifteenth edition of the festival adopts the slogan "!f Unites" and the festival's promotional film is shaped accordingly. Two groups of people who are distant from each other are starting to take baby steps as they hear a voice-off saying, "Let those whose hearts beat step forward, those who breathe, those who dream, those who make mistakes, those who regret, those who wonder, those who are confused, those who have wounds, those who hide their wounds, those who fear death, those who survive, unite: !f begins" When the film ends, the groups hug each other tightly. Ciliv explains that they see film festivals as a space for living together and that their job as directors is to share the stories that create the opportunity to live together.[17]

In doing so, they openly acknowledge their intention of trying to build a communal living space with a broad perspective, taking the initiative and care to be alternative like the posters of the twelfth festival mentioned earlier. Another word from the same edition, "dissidence," is underlined in a particular way. For instance, the festival's seventh edition's promotional films, posters, and booklets prominently feature the "black sheep" motif. In the tenth edition, based on a Turkish idiom, a giant snail wanders around a neighborhood. This idiom, "selling snails in a Muslim neighborhood," emphasizes an unsuitable or unprofitable venture due to a lack of demand or interest. This festival celebrates reaching a decade and making it distinctive from the "others." The founding directors said many mocked the idea of an alternative festival when it was first pitched. But as the festival enters its tenth year, it subtly celebrates the existence of a community in the "Muslim

[17] Ciliv, interview.

neighborhood" where "it is possible to buy and sell snails." Indeed, the festival was unifying yet under several shared values.

In particular, the festival actively used social media platforms to draw attention to human rights violations. In our interview, Pelin Turgut reflected on the festival's efforts to be an ally for many communities, especially the minorities. Therefore, besides promoting the festival, the festival's social media channels were spreading solidarity expressions, most notably on Twitter. !f joined Twitter in October 2009; since then, over 6,700 tweets have been sent from the festival account, and the festival had 580,000 followers in June 2018. Although it has been inactive for almost three years, it still has over half a million followers. As of June 2023, !f remains Turkey's most popular festival on Twitter, surpassing the closest competitor, IFF, which has approximately 310,000 followers. A similar situation is found comparing international festivals. Until recently, !f had a more significant following than the Cannes Film Festival and still maintains more followers than other A-list festivals such as Berlin, Locarno, San Sebastian, and Cairo. But what was the reason for the festival to be widely followed?

Zaferhan Yumru, the festival's digital media coordinator, confirms opening a Twitter account was born out of curiosity for a new platform to reach "!f People" and a desire to have fun, not to promote the festival.[18] In the early years , onfestival's Twitter account, there were a lot of not-so-promotional tweets about how much the international guests loved the Turkish sausage and eggs for breakfast in the morning and how the festival team had to call it a day due to hangover. Starting from this period until the end of 2015, the festival also used its account not only to share other film festival proposals but also to announce many other cultural and artistic events such as Istanbul Film Festival, Documentarist, Queerfest, Filmmor, European Human Rights Film Festival, Sustainable Living Festival. In Yumru's words, they were calling people who would accompany them to the events that the festival team would be attending, people with whom “they were in tune”.[19] Most team members had access to the accounts, enabling them to freely share

[18] Zaferhan Yumru, online interview by author, September, 9, 2022.
[19] Yumru, interview.

content without needing assistance from a professional social media management company.

Through its social media platforms, the festival exhibited solidarity with various causes, including imprisoned journalists, the LGBTI+ community after the ban on the pride parade, Kazım Kızıl, a video-activist and documentary filmmaker who was arrested while covering a protest, and Pınar Selek, a human rights activist who subjected torture while in custody. During the Gezi Park protests, the festival's blog published a post titled "We are not a minority, we are enlightened," expressing a clear stance. Throughout 2012 and 2014, the festival's Twitter account was actively used to raise voices of solidarity with the aforementioned groups and individuals, during which time the number of followers increased by 200% to over 300,000. This increase is mainly attributable to the festival's position during the Gezi Park protests.

In the edition after the Gezi Park protests, the festival's trailer includes references to the incidents of police violence and says, "It didn't even hurt!" In the film, a man in black with a smoky face starts hitting with a mallet, the chicks popping up from the whac-a-mole machine on a deserted street at night . Frustrated by the chicks saying, "It didn't even hurt," each time, the man takes out a second mallet and starts hitting harder, and soon the machine shuts down. As the man turns away, thinking he has defeated the machine, thousands of chicks pop up from the street, shouting in unison, "It didn't even hurt!", forcing the man to retreat. This focus on a current political theme aligned with the festival's curated program, which has expanded over time. According to Yücel, the festival initially focused on films addressing gender and identity issues. However, it expanded its range to include different genres in its program over time. "These genres included documentaries shot in war-torn regions, examples of video activism, experimental productions blended with contemporary art, and films that highlight ecological issues. As a result, !f Istanbul was able to widen its program and committed itself to follow the local and global political landscape more closely." (Yücel 2012, 12).

The festival has expanded not only its films but also its side events in this regard. In the early years, the events mainly focused on film production, gradually opening space for

activists, collectives, and NGOs. These events were mostly free of charge, except for some workshops. With the participation of associations, groups, and collectives such as Say Stop to Racism and Nationalism, Global Peace and Justice Coalition, Médecins sans frontières, Istanbul Queer Art Collective, and Slow Food Istanbul, the festival highlighted many contemporary and activist themes beyond the cinema. At these events, topics ranging from climate change, veganism, anti-racism and human rights activism were on the table. The shared values discussed in the other criteria featured prominently in these events that were shaped around current social and political debates. According to Chavis and McMillan's shared valued event hypothesis, communities that experience significant events together tend to have a stronger sense of community (Mcmillan and Chavis 1986, 14). Through the festival events, it emphasized the importance of collectively discussing these "important events" and experience sharing among participants. For instance, a "Healing Words" workshop was conducted in the edition following the Gezi Park protests. The workshop's announcement was prefaced with a quotation: "When we dream alone, it's just a dream. But when we dream together, it's the beginning of a new reality."

> Eight months after the historic events at Gezi, this half-day workshop aims to build a 'going-on' story from the raw material of participants' personal experiences of what happened. Participants will be led through collaborative creative exercises to help shape a story out of their own experience and to connect deeply with an audience. Reflecting on our experiences through story-telling is a powerful way to digest the past and release "frozen' memories into the living, breathing space between us. Sharing with a group allows our stories to be transformed into something larger than ourselves; we are healed both individually and as a community. Together, we learn how to bring a more fluid approach to the past and to connect to the gifts inherent in every lived experience. This frees us up to be more ready and capable of meeting the story of the present moment and the future as it unfolds (13. !F İstanbul Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali 2014, 142).

The festival also included workshops, dance performances, exhibitions, and discussions on different art forms. Open to everyone, parties, happy hours, and coffee hours, which set out to unite the day and night of the festival, tried to bring together the festival's stakeholders. Thus, it actively applied Chavis and McMillan's contact hypothesis for shared emotional connection: "The more people interact, the more likely they are to become closer". (Mcmillan and Chavis 1986, 14).

Here, I argue that Roy's definition of documentary film festivals, which reflects on their capacity for transformative learning, community building, and solidarity creation, can be applied to !f. "These festivals provide alternative information, foster critical thinking skills and media literacy, build community, foster solidarity, and contribute to social movements by exposing problems as well as victories. These festivals create a public space for exchange, dialogue, and inspiration for preferred futures." (Roy 2016, 12). !f was not a documentary film festival, but it built its story on the abovementioned values. The fact that one cannot characterize the festival as a documentary film festival or a community-based festival does negate the valuable experiences and contributions it offers. The petition from !f people expressing their longing for the creative space that fosters a sense of community and enables free expression shows that the festival has a unifying impact that transcends a film festival.

After the festival's core team was dismissed, the new management added the !f Spirit tab[20] to the festival's website, stating that the festival will continue to be a collective, polyphonic platform for life and cinema. However, under the new management, the festival was only organized for one other edition before going dormant. The values of this collective polyphonic life platform were the efforts of the founding team who worked from the beginning to the end of the festival and the active participation of !f People. The festival and its core team imagined a community that embraces shared values, irrespective of diverse backgrounds and !f People, like numerous individuals, collectives, and movements that the festival stood in solidarity with, stood in solidarity with the festival. Today !f seems over, but its impacts are still spreading. As we witness the full-length works of directors who initially showcased their talents through short films at the festival, and as the effects of the films I watched and the events I attended at the festival continue their journey in me, !f continues to unite us.

[20] http://ifistanbul.com.tr/if-ruhu/ Accessed on June, 2, 2023.

5. CONCLUSION

Ahead of its last edition, !f's founding team tweeted to celebrate the birthday of one of their greatest inspirations: Virginia Woolf. Indeed, the founders' attempt to create such a festival was like Woolf searching for her idea in *A Room of One's Own.* On a beautiful October day, Woolf sits on the bank next to the river and drops her fishing rod of thought into the river's depths. Suddenly, she sees an idea forming at the end of her fishing rod with a sudden accumulation. She carefully picks it up and lays it carefully on the ground. "Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked" she says, "But however small it was, it had, nevertheless, the mysterious property of its kind - put back into the mind, it became at once very exciting, and important; and as it darted and sank, and flashed hither and thither, set up such a wash and tumult of ideas that it was impossible to sit still." (Woolf 2020, 5).

Starting with a small team with no experience in organizing film festivals, with a selection of 35 films by asking friends or people they could find in the film industry when they were in trouble, !f had quadrupled the number of films and audiences by its fifteenth year. Despite its name "!f Istanbul", the festival spread to Ankara, then to Izmir, and, with online selections, to many cities in Turkey and worldwide. The extent to which "international", another word in the festival's name, is well employed could be the subject of another study. Still, as Turan says, sometimes the unifying concept of the festival can be completely unexpected. "Occasionally, the fit between subject and locale is so good that the synergy creates an international institution."(Turan 2002, 6). !f has filled a niche. The fact that the festival hosted twenty thousand people in its inaugural year indicated not just the festival's success but also the interest in that niche area. The festival happened to be in the right place at the right time.

As the new century approached, festivals worldwide ensured their institutional and discursive power, establishing alternative distribution and screening platforms to the conventional film industry and funding projects that support emerging world cinema to

expand their audience profiles. As festivals hosting film markets promoted films of diverse genres and forms across various regions, audiences' demand for these films intensified accordingly and vice versa. This two-way transaction also led to the growth and expansion of small-scale film festivals, focusing on various landscapes, genres, or forms. Festivals have strengthened their transnational position and expanded their landscape. As the landscape broadened, their interconnectedness was reinforced rather than dissolved. A "festival film" phenomenon that is difficult to explain precisely has arisen. The festival circuit provides a platform for these films -exploring niche subject matters that appeal to festival-goers, film professionals, and critics - to be discovered, celebrated, and potentially secure distribution arrangements for a larger audience.

In the beginning, what is signified by the word "independent" in the name !f was a manifestation of this "festival film". One might ask if festival films were not screened in Turkey until then. Of course, they were being shown. The Turkish film festival history can be traced back to 1948. In those years, the events defined as festivals were mostly celebratory gatherings where national cinema was honored. Most events initiated during that period were organized under the "Turkish Film Festival" name. In 1964, the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival broke this chain of competition-based events that lacked continuity. However, the emphasis on national cinema remained relatively long in both AGOFF and following festivals, often initiated by municipalities. In the year following the establishment of AGOFF, another exciting incident occurred for the Turkish film community: The Turkish Cinematheque Association was founded. The association started to program the finest examples of world cinema that were not released in Turkey and attracted great interest quickly.

Along with classics, seminal features of cinema history, genre films, director and actor retrospectives, Sinematek also presents films by directors such as Bergman, Wajda, Dreyer, and Ray, whose films have never been screened in Turkey. The importance of the association lies therein: It has not only programmed films for a niche audience in Turkey, but it has also created its community by creating a space for dialogue where contemporary political and artistic debates take place. Moreover, it has developed relationships with other countries' Cinematheques and embassies. It has become part of an international

network to be able to bring films from countries whose films have never or rarely been shown in Turkey. The association was closed after the 1980 coup d'état, but it had shown that an audience in Turkey demands what is called a "festival film". The interest in the Istanbul Film Festival, which started two years after the association shut down, proved that demand. But what was the primary motivation for organizing an “independent film festival” that also shows festival films in the same city eighteen years later?

The festival has been among the pioneers in recognizing the growing interest in programming independent American films, cult films, and emerging directors' unconventional films following the proliferation of private TV channels in Turkey. So the first aim was to start a festival to fill this niche. In its first years, the festival did indeed program American independent films and award-winning films from various international festivals. However, it highlighted more and more emerging directors, short films from Turkey, the finest examples of world cinema, cutting-edge documentaries, and videos. On the other hand, the festival closely followed international social and political agendas and opened up a space for films, NGOs, and collectives that address these agendas. Based on this programming position taken by the festival, the festival changed its discourse from "independent film" to "!f film". The phenomenon called the "!f film" consisted of bold, thought-provoking, and outspoken films that seek fresh approaches to narrative and storytelling.

The festival also adopted a discourse that characterized the filmmakers that produce these films and the audience interested in these films as "!f people". This conceptualization flourished not only in the discourse of the festival team but also among the festival's stakeholders. Over the years, the festival has updated its position to provide a space that seeks to bring together the community of "!f people". What motivated me to do this study was the fact that I felt that I belonged to a community, considering that I myself am a "!f person". Of course, I am not suggesting that the festival designed this discourse not to sustain itself but as a genuine social welfare project.

Nevertheless, I believe it would be beneficial to uncover the approaches employed by the festival to create a sense of community within me and foster solidarity following the

dismissal of its founding team. Therefore, this thesis reads the festival through the four criteria of "sense of community" proposed by Chavis and McMillan. Throughout the festival's 17-year journey, from its inception until the dismissal of the founding team, the steps taken to foster a sense of community, including programming, side events, industry-supporting projects, and its social media usage, are examined based on these criteria. The reason for applying these criteria to the festival is not to praise this festival. The ability of festivals to build community is often examined for community-oriented festivals, activist, and identity-based festivals. In terms of their organizational structures and strategies, these festivals are associated with audience festivals according to Mark Peranson's (2008) dual model of festivals. According to Peranson's model, festivals are divided into audience festivals and business festivals. The business festivals are organized with high budgets, are not dependent on ticket sales thanks to significant corporate sponsorships and subsidies, and prioritize premieres and guest screenings. On the other hand, audience festivals are organized with small teams and limited corporate support, are not premiere-oriented, have limited guest attendance, and do not have a sustained growth trajectory.

The festival that is the subject of this thesis falls in a somewhat ambiguous part of this binary model. The programming, which was gala-oriented in the first years, slowly started to include the fringe. Although the festival supports independent filmmakers, distributors, and producers, it does not have a market. Many editions were not subsidized by the state or state-affiliated institutions but had high-profile sponsors. Nevertheless, the festival adopted a relatively audience-centered approach. The festival occupied a particular position in the Turkish film festival landscape, broadly divided into festivals organized by municipalities and associations/institutions. Therefore, the primary purpose of reading a festival with such characteristics through the lens of the sense of community is to find out whether festivals that are not defined by the adjective community (community-based, community-led, or community-centered) may also take a position that can prioritize community.

When examined through the four criteria of a sense of community, the festival actively implements the necessary steps for membership through self-identification and programming. Based on empowerment and mutual sharing, the relationship with

stakeholders shows a similar emphasis on reinforcement. Like membership, the motivation to create a shared emotional connection is reflected in the festival's ephemera grounded in shared values and side events, rooted in the participatory nature of the festival. On the other hand, although the festival actively invites stakeholders to the curation process, it is seen that the festival has shortcomings in disclosing its power dynamics, which could be considered a result of its ambiguous position in the business and audience festival duality. This is why the festival's stakeholders and audiences were shocked when CGV, the owner of its brand rights, dismissed its co-directors and founding team. Therefore, festivals with similar characteristics could be recommended to articulate power dynamics within the festival more explicitly to create trust and, consequently, a stronger sense of community.

Founded by a small team, it was through the sincere efforts of this founding team that the festival adopted an attitude that prioritized the community, despite the business-oriented approach of the movie theater chain. This is why "!f people" believed the festival's spirit could not be preserved without the co-directors. The founding co-directors are seen as the guarantors of the festival's spirit. The underground events that the directors organized before launching the festival, which started as a closed circuit and spread to a large community, undoubtedly contributed to the festival's community-building process. Directors recognized the demand for change and novelty at the turn of the new century. They did not hesitate to offer tools and spaces that would appeal to a crowd hungry for something new and alternative while at the same time promoting new ways of thinking and fostering a dialogue each edition. Serra and Pelin's "rooms of their own" expanded and included many more people.

Of course, the fact that the festival is no longer organized poses some limitations for the study. As the festival is not being held anymore, it is impossible to ask the festival's stakeholders whether they have this sense of community or not and how they perceive the festival's strategies for fostering a sense of community and community. Future studies can provide an empirical evaluation of ongoing festivals with similar characteristics by asking participants questions that can fulfill the four criteria of a sense of community and compare the practices of various festivals in fostering a sense of community. However, I

hope that examining such a festival defines itself and its efforts and strategies to spark a sense of community will both contribute to the study of film festivals and provide guidance to film festival professionals. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the practices of thinking about festivals, I believe it might be useful to explore how the festival, which started gathering its participants both physically and virtually many years ago, was able to create a sense of community, even if it was not labeled as a community festival, and what steps were taken to accomplish it.

Similarly, future studies can read the festival in the context of recent Turkish history since the festival is a contemporary of the Justice and Development Party government, which is still in power today. The government's culture and arts policies, the changes and transformations the festival has undergone through/due to these policies, and the relationship between the discourses produced by the festival, especially those that imply oppositional views, and the current government are all worthy of study. Hence, these studies can underline the contribution of oppositional discourse to the festival's creation of a sense of community, especially as the festival actively emphasized dissidence in the creation of membership.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

3. AFM Bağımsız Filmler Festivali. 2004. İstanbul: Kolektif Prodüksiyon.

4. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali. 2005. İstanbul: Kolektif Prodüksiyon.

5. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali. 2006. İstanbul: Kolektif Prodüksiyon.

8. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali. 2009. İstanbul: Net Film.

9. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali. 2010. İstanbul: Net Film.

13. !f İstanbul Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali . 2014. İstanbul: !f İstanbul.

Adongo, Raymond, and Seongseop (Sam) Kim. 2018. "Whose Festival Is It Anyway? Analysis of Festival Stakeholder Power, Legitimacy, Urgency, and the Sustainability of Local Festivals." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 26 (11): 1863–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2018.1514042.

Akdemir, Gamze. 2002. "Zihinsel Serbestlik Önemli." *Cumhuriyet*, January 20, 2002. https://egazete.cumhuriyet.com.tr/oku/192/2002-01-20/15.

Akis. 1959. "Türk Film Festivali," June 16, 1959.

Akis. 1961. "Festivalimiz," May 15, 1961.

Akis. 1965. "Festival Furyası," May 22, 1965.

Aksoy, Tunca. 1964. "Antalya Film Festivali Bugün Başlıyor." *Milliyet*, October 1, 1964. http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/GununYayinlari/u5bVSSRAr0FRAx5pAIPxtA_x3D__x3D_.

Anderson, Benedict. 2016. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London, England: Verso Books.

Andruske, Cynthia, and Steven Noble. 2006. "Performing Knowledges of Inquiry in the Creases of Festivals: Creating a Model for Urban and Rural Dialogue." In *CASAE National Conference On-Line Proceedings*, 1–6. Toronto: York University.

Arpad, Burhan. 1991a. "Türk Filmi." *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, April 23, 1991. https://egazete.cumhuriyet.com.tr/oku/192/1991-04-23/2.

———. 1991b. “Türk Filmi Dolayısıyla...” *1991*, May 14, 1991. https://egazete.cumhuriyet.com.tr/oku/192/1991-05-14/2.

Bacon, J. 2009. *The Art of Community: Building the New Age of Participation*. Theory in Practice. O’Reilly Media.

Başgüney, Hakkı. 2010. *Türk Sinematek Derneği - Türkiye’de Sinema ve Politik Tartışma*. İstanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık.

Behlil, Melis, and Esin Paça Cengiz. 2016. “Selections from ‘The Fight for National Cinema’, by Halit Refiğ.” *Cinema Journal* 55 (3): 1–16.

Biaett, Vernon. 2014. “Community Festivals.” In *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, edited by Alex C Michalos, 1054–55. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_461.

BirGün. 2018. “‘!F İstanbul Daha Güçlü Bir Şekilde Devam Edecek,’” October 23, 2018.

Block, Peter. 2009. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. BK Business. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Bosma, Peter. 2015. “Curating Film Festivals.” In *Film Programming : Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives*, 68–81. Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/columbia/9780231174596.003.0005.

Boydak, Serpil, and Sadi Çilingir. 2007. “Sinema İzleyici Profili Araştırması.” April 5, 2007. https://sadibey.com/2007/04/05/sinema-izleyici-profili-arastirmasi/.

Brunow, Dagmar. 2020. “Come Together? Curating Communal Viewing Experiences for Hybrid and Online Film Festivals.” *NECSUS_European Journal of Media Studies* 9 (2): 339–47.

Burgess, Diane, and Brendan Kredell. 2016. “Positionality and Film Festival Research: A Conversation.” In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*.

Bursalı, Orhan. 2021. “Yakın Geçmişin Bugüne Işık Tutması Dileğiyle, 2001 Krizi.” *Cumhuriyet*, February 21, 2021. https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/orhan-bursali/yakin-gecmisin-bugune-isik-tutmasi-dilegiyle-2001-krizi-1815295.

Clarke, Alan, and Allan Jepson. 2011. “Power and Hegemony within a Community Festival.” *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 2 (March): 7–19. https://doi.org/10.1108/17582951111116588.

Dayan, Daniel. 2000. “Looking for Sundance: The Social Construction of a Film Festival.” In *In Moving Images, Culture and the Mind*, edited by Id Bondebjerg, 43–52. University of Luton Press.

Demirkol, Altan. 1969a. “Jüri Üyeleri Yemin Belgesi İmzaladılar.” *Milliyet*, May 17, 1969.

http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/GununYayinlari/h_x2B_dhM_x2F_IE_x2B_UlOfYpWtlz0nA_x3D__x3D_.

———. 1969b. “Festival Komitesi Jüriyi Suçladı...” *Milliyet*, May 21, 1969. http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/GununYayinlari/_x2B_KVusm7OWD9aDCcw9_x2B_dilg_x3D__x3D_.

Deniz, Ümit. 1953a. “Perde ve Sahnenin Bütün Otoritelerini Toplayan Balo.” *Milliyet*, May 2, 1953.

———. 1953b. “Sahne Sanatkarlarımızın Nihayet Yüzü Gülüyor.” *Milliyet*, December 19, 1953.

Derrett, Ros. 2003. “Festivals and Regional Destinations: How Festivals Demonstrate a Sense of Community and Place.” *Rural Society* 13 (1): 35–53. https://doi.org/10.5172/rsj.351.13.1.35.

Dorsay, Atilla. 2002. “Kutsal Aile Perili Evde Mahsur Kaldı.” *Sabah*, February 9, 2002.

Elsaesser, Thomas. 2005. *Face to Face with Hollywood*. Amsterdam University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n11c.

Erdoğan, Nezih. 2001. “Üç Seyirci: Popüler Eğlence Biçimlerinin Alımlanması Üzerine Notlar.” *Türk Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler* 2: 219–30.

Erkılıç, Hakan. 2009. “Düş Şatolarından Çoklu Salonlara Değişen Seyir Kültürü ve Sinema.” *Kebikeç İnsan Bilimleri İçin Kaynak Araştırmaları Dergisi* 0 (28): 143–62. http://search/yayin/detay/105116.

———. 2021. “Sunuş: Film Festivalleri Çalışmaları ve Türkiye.” In *Film Festivalleri E-Kitabı*, edited by Hakan Erkılıç. Vol. 1. De Ki.

Estukyan, Vartan. 2018. “Bu Yıl Hayat ‘!F İstanbul’la Var.” *AGOS*, February 16, 2018. https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/20218/bu-yil-hayat-f-istanbulla-var.

!f İstanbul. 2012. !“!F İstanbul ‘Bak Bu Tam !F’lik!’ Dediğiniz ‘Kısa’ Önerilerinizi Bekliyor!” 2012. November 20, 2012. https://ifistanbul.com/kisaoneri/.

“Filmlerimiz.” 1948. İstanbul: İktisadi Yürüyüş Matbaası ve Neşriyat Yurdu.

Filmloverss. 2018. “17. !F İstanbul: Serra Ciliv ve Mustafa Uzuner Röportajı,” 2018.

FIAPF. 2023. “Accredited Festivals.” 2023. https://fiapf.org/festivals/accredited-festivals/competitive-specialised-feature-film-festivals/.

Göl, Berke, ed. 2012. “Soruşturma: Hisar Kısa Film Seçkisi.” In *Mithat Alam Film Merkezi Söyleşi ve Panel Yıllığı 2011*, 219–53. İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi.

Gülçur, A S, İ Eken, T C Kalkınma Bakanlığı, İstanbul Ticaret Odası, and İstanbul Düşünce Akademisi. 2017. *Türkiye'de Film Endüstrisi (2011-2015)*. Yayın No. İstanbul Ticaret Odası (İTO) İstanbul Düşünce Akademisi (İDA).

Gusfield, J R. 1978. *Community: A Critical Response*. Harper Colophon Books. Harper & Row.

Hacızade, Nigâr. 2015. "!F İstanbul'un Hikayesi: Yapsak Mı? Yapabilir Miyiz? Gel Deneyelim." *5Harfliler*, February 6, 2015. https://www.5harfliler.com/f-istanbulun-hikayesi-yapsak-mi-yapabilir-miyiz-gel-deneyelim/.

"Historique." 2023. https://fr.montecarlosbm-corporate.com/la-societe/historique/.

Horst, Carole. 2002. "Istanbul Walks on Cutting Edge with Rookie Fest." *Variety* 388 (2): 5.

İlbuğa, Emine Uçar. 2018. "Experiences of Watching Cinema in Antalya in 60's and 70's." *Journal* 5 (1): 61–90.

IKSV. 2023. "History." 2023. https://film.iksv.org/en/about-the-festival/history-2.

Iordanova, Dina. 2013. *The Film Festival Reader*. St Andrews, Scotland: St Andrews Film Studies.

Irvine, Elizabeth J. 2015. "Continuity in Intermittent Organisations : The Organising Practices of Festival and Community of a UK Film Festival." University of St Andrews.

Kaos GL. 2011. !"!F'in LGBT Duyarlılığına Tepki," February 28, 2011. https://kaosgl.org/haber/frsquoin-lgbt-duyarliligirsquona-tepki.

Kaya, Dilek. 2013. "Film Censorship During the Golden Era of Turkish Cinema." In . https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137061980_9.

Kredell, Brendan. 2013. "The Business of Audience Festivals–Calgary International Film Festival 2012." *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies* 2 (2): 588–93.

Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to the Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford University Press.

Loist, Skadi. 2016. "The Film Festival Circuit: Networks, Hierarchies, and Circulation." In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*.

MacAloon, J. J. 1984. "Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance." In *Liminality and Performative Genres*.

Mcmillan, David, and David Chavis. 1986. "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory." *Journal of Community Psychology* 14 (January): 6–23. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:13.0.CO;2-I.

McMillan, David W. 1996. “Sense of Community.” *Journal of Community Psychology* 24 (4): 315–25.

Milliyet. 1965. “Festivalcilik ve Oyunları,” June 23, 1965. http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/GununYayinlari/Pz7M_x2F_xjkBbOxnlI1lf4XAg_x3D__x3D_.

Milliyet. ———. 2011. “Bağımsız Film Festivali 10’uncu Yılını Kutluyor,” February 12, 2011. https://www.milliyet.com.tr/cumartesi/bagimsiz-film-festivali-10-uncu-yilini-kutluyor-1351220.

Milliyet Kültür&Sanat. 2002. “Sanatın Bağımsızlığı,” January 17, 2002.

“New Film Fund.” 2023. https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/34-our-works/161-new-film-fund/.

Nichols, Bill. 1994. “Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Film Festival Circuit.” *Film Quarterly* 47: 16–30.

Onaran, Alim Şerif. 1974. “Türkiye’de Sinemanın Örgütlenmesi Sorunu.” *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 29 (02): 65–87.

Özyılmaz, Özge. 2020. “Türkiye’de Sinemanın Öncü Girişimcileri: İpekçiler.” *Journal* 18 (36): 699–712.

Peranson, Mark. 2008. “First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals.” *Cinéaste* 33 (3): 37–43.

Popescu, Stefan. 2015. “Festival Director’s Report: Sydney Underground Film Festival -A Community of Cinema Junkies.” *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 9 (2): 205–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/17503175.2015.1058649.

Póvoa, Débora. 2023. “‘The Festival Is Ours’: Power Dynamics of Community Participation in the Alter Do Chão Film Festival.” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 26 (2): 200–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/13678779231154288.

Rastegar, Roya. 2016a. “Seeing Differently: The Curatorial Potential of Film Festival Programming.” In *Film Festivals*.

———. 2016b. “Seeing Differently: The Curatorial Potential of Film Festival Programming.” In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, 181–95. Taylor and Francis Inc.

Richards, Stuart, and Lauren Carroll Harris. 2020. “From the Event to the Everyday: Distributor-Driven Film Festivals.” *Media International Australia* 180 (1): 91–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X20938479.

Richards, Stuart, and Jessica Pacella. 2022. “‘We Need to Keep Making Stuff, Regardless of What the Situation Is’: Creativity and the Film Festival Sector during

COVID-19." *Arts and the Market* 13 (1): 20–32. https://doi.org/10.1108/AAM-11-2021-0061.

Roy, Carole. 2016. *Documentary Film Festivals : Transformative Learning, Community Building & Solidarity*. Transgressions (Rotterdam, Netherlands). Rotterdam: Brill.

"Royan Şenliği ve Paris'te Türk Filmleri Haftası - Royan Festival and the Turkish Cinema Week in Paris." 2018.

Sarason, Seymour B. 1974. *The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology. The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology.* Cambridge, MA, US: Brookline Books.

Scheinert, Daniel, and Daniel Kwan. 2022. *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. United States: A24.

Screenfest. 2023. "Proje Bilgisi." 2023. http://www.screenfest.org/proje/proje-hakkinda/.

Şener, Erman. 1972. *Festivaller*. Anlam Yayınları.

Solmaz, Hilal. 2015. "'!Flik Film Diye Bir Şey Var.'" *Yurt Gazetesi*, February 8, 2015.

Stevens, Kirsten. 2016. *Australian Film Festivals : Audience, Place, and Exhibition Culture*. *Australian Film Festivals*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58130-3.

Taillibert, Christel, and John Wäfler. 2016. "Groundwork for a (Pre)History of Film Festivals." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14 (1): 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2015.1106688.

Taşçıyan, Alin. 2001. "Bağımsız Filmler İstanbul Sinemalarında." *Milliyet Pazar*, December 30, 2001.

TRT Akademi. 2018. "Sinema ve Festival İzleyici Eğilimleri ve Durum Tespit Araştırması." *TRT Akademi*, 1–281.

Turan, Kenneth. 2002. *Sundance to Sarajevo : Film Festivals and the World They Made*. *Sundance to Sarajevo*. University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520930827.

Türk Sineması : Sorunlar ve Fırsatlar. 2010. İstanbul. İstanbul Ticaret Odası Yayınları.

Uçansu, Hülya. 2012. *Bir Uzun Mesafe Festivalcisinin Anıları: Sinema Günleri'nden İstanbul Film Festivali'ne.* İstanbul. Doğan Kitap.

Ünal, Zeynep, ed. 2017. “Yeni Türkiye Belgeselleri Paneli.” In *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Mithat Alam Film Merkezi Söyleşi ve Panel Yıllığı 2006*. İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi.

Valck, Marijke de. 2007. *From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*. Amsterdam University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mv45.

———. 2016a. “Fostering Art, Adding Value, Cultivating Taste: Film Festivals as Sites of Cultural Legitimization.” In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*.

———. 2016b. “Introduction: What Is a Film Festival? How to Study Festivals and Why You Should.” *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*.

Vitrinel, Ece. 2020. “‘Benim Yerim’den ‘Yok-Yerler’e: İstanbul’da Güncel Seyir Deneyimine Dair Salon-Içi Manzaralar.” *Sinecine Sinema Araştırmaları Dergisi* 11 (September): 227–65. https://doi.org/10.32001/sinecine.742896.

Winkle, Christine M Van, and Kyle Maurice Woosnam. 2014. “Sense of Community and Perceptions of Festival Social Impacts.” *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 5: 22–38.

Wong, Cindy Hing Yuk. 2016. “Publics and Counterpublics: Rethinking Film Festivals as Public Spheres.” In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*. 83-99.

Wong, Cindy Hung-Yuk. 2011. *Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*. Rutgers University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hjg83.

Woolf, Virginia. 2020. *A Room of One’s Own*. Renard Press.

Yıldırım, Bayezid. 1990. “Uluslararası Film Festivalleri Kapsamında Türk Sineması.” İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsair&AN=edsair.od..... 10208..0b0a5417620bb3042c6ffdaa039caa6e&lang=tr&site=eds-live.

Yıldız, Esra. 2017. “Lost Images, Silenced Past: Rethinking the Film Practices of Genç Sinema (Young Cinema) from 1968 to 1971.” In The Politics of Culture in Turkey, Greece & Cyprus Performing the left Since the Sixties, 142–62. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315690803-7.

Yücel, Fırat, ed. 2009. *8. AFM Uluslararası Bağımsız Filmler Festivali*. İstanbul: !f İstanbul.

———. 2012. “Bağımsız Filmler Bağımsız Festival.” *ZERO*, 2012.

———. 2018. “Kültürel ‘Kurtarılmış Bölge’: Sinematek.” *Vesaire*, July 13, 2018. https://vesaire.org/kulturel-kurtarilmis-bolge-sinematek/.

Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı. 2023. “Arama: ‘Film Festivali.’” 2023. https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp.

Yüksel, Uğur. 2014. “Press Release: 13th !F Istanbul Independent Film Festival.”

CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Information

Uğurhan Topcuoğlu

Academic Background

Master of Arts in Cinema and Television, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, 2020-2023.

Bachelor's Degree in Communication, Galatasaray University, Istanbul, 2015-2020.

Bachelor's Degree in Communication and Information Sciences, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, France, 2017-2020.

Foreign Languages

French, English.

Work Experience

Research Assistant, Galatasaray University, Faculty of Communication, Istanbul, 2020-…

Project Assistant, Beyoğlu Sineması, Istanbul, 2020-2021.