Projections of Popular Culture Through the Study of the Cinema Market in Contemporary Greece.

Introduction

Cinema is considered to be the most popular of cultural practices reflecting a plethora of social, economic and cultural phenomena in modern societies. While locating our research in the general framework of cultural studies which seeks to account for cultural differences and practices by reference to the overall map of social relations (O'Sullivan et al. 1998: 60), our aim is to understand how culture should be specified in itself and in relation to economics and the social sphere.

The European film industry has entered a period of decline and the appropriate response to this has become a matter of some debate. Three main factors are at the root of the current crisis in European cinema; a decline in cinema audiences, a decline in production and the increasing domination of the European box-office by Hollywood. (Hill 1994:53-80)

Hollywood's domination of European markets is not, of course, a new phenomenon and stretches back to at least the end of First World War. What is new, however, is the extent of this domination and, in an age of increased economic globalisation, the way in which specific models and practices are imported, undermining the viability of specific national characteristics linked to memory, experiences and identity.

Many researchers postulate that western protectionism\(^1\) on a political level has made Greece receptive to influences that came from the west. (Bacoynnopoulos in Demopoulos 1995: 72) Following this general postulation our hypothesis is that the formation of a cinematic popular culture has always been adjacent to international economic interests.

The increasing presence of multimedia moguls and the domination of the European market by Hollywood is incontrovertible. In Europe only the Hollywood majors have access to a pan-European distribution network and as a result they have been able to dominate the European market place. Furthermore, majors have become increasingly involved in European exhibition (through the opening of multiplexes) and this has further facilitated the passage of American films into European cinemas.\(^2\) According to some European Union research on the European cinema industry (CEE 1997), two thirds of the annual admissions in Europe are made in multiplexes. More than 2500 screens have been constructed since 1997 and a strategy of occupation of the terrain in different markets is becoming evident.

The ongoing success of these consumption sites, which project and shape popular culture, raises many questions about the future of cinema practices in Greece. What can be
the consequences on the various national characteristics in exhibition like open-air cinemas? Can those changes in cinema going have an impact on other leisure and social practices in general?

As Denis McQuail has noted, with the growth of an international media industry we see evidence of an 'international media culture', which can be recognised in similar standards world-wide as well as in content forms, genres and the actual substance of communication (McQuail 1994: 28-29). It has also been suggested that it is a consequence of globalisation, which affects social structures, relations and cultures, as well as of the rapid adoption of the 'free market' principles and philosophy in most western countries in the post-modern era (McQuail 1994: 11-12).

Globalisation is a double -edged process, which encourages both differentiation and homogenisation. (Jusdanis 1996:153) Jusdanis's critical discussion of early globalisation theorists, (even though he is referring to different ethnic identities within a nation-state and particularly to the United States) reveals that they underestimated the assimilative appeal of both Americanisation and consumer culture. He takes as one example of homogenisation the desolation of shopping centres in small towns by superstores arguing that these devastating consequences are rarely discussed by researchers more concerned by the violation of boundaries. (Jusdanis 1996:159) It is precisely such global phenomena that will be discussed throughout this paper within the Greek context regarding the relationship between the projections of popular culture through the study of cinema market.

Theoretical framework and methodological problems

Recent research (Cladel et all, 2001; Creton, 2001; Guy, 2000) brings more attention to the socio-economic study of cinema and in particular to the place of cinema theatres in the urban space. Cinema theatres are indeed considered as an integral part of urban space, which also participate in the definition of a local geography. Jean Michel Guy (2000) also argues that cinema theatres contribute to the preservation of a collective memory, as they constitute a prevalent socio-cultural practice linked to a specific place, which acts as a common reference or landmark for numerous people.

Traditionally, socio-economic approaches concerning film studies tend to examine cinema industries according to the triptych: production, distribution, and exhibition. This final aspect will be examined throughout this paper. Robert Allen's influential article "From exhibition to reception: reflections on the audience in film history" (Allen, 1990) underlines how rarely audience and exhibition featured in film history and how little attention was given to the conditions in which viewers actually saw films until the late eighties. Dimitris Eleftheriotis (2001: 180) also demonstrates that the theoretical models of the 1960s and 1970s not only overlooked the social construction of the audience but also depended on a certain type of exhibition practice that was defined as universal and normal. The author illustrates that film theory of the '70s on spectatorship often proposed monolithic accounts of the viewing experience.

*The defining characteristic of these accounts is their negativity. The structure of the film theatre is meaningful only in terms of its self-effacement as a dark, silent and non-descript background that does not interfere with the intense, all-absorbing, one-to-one relationship between spectator and screen.* (Eleftheriotis 2001: 181-182)
Eleftheriotis comes to a very interesting conclusion juxtaposing the above theories with Greek spectatorship and more particularly that of open-air cinemas of the 1960s, which present diametrically opposed characteristics. The above arguments point out how exhibition practices are interconnected with idiosyncratic national histories as well as peoples temperaments which makes their study catalytic for the understanding of modern media cultures. (Sifaki 2003)

Greek bibliography on cinema is centred more on the history of Greek cinema and the aesthetics of films. The work of Aglaïa Mitropoulou and Yannis Soldatos which cover the whole history of Greek cinema until today remain fundamental on the field of film history. Nevertheless, bibliography on the Greek film industry being quite limited5 our main methodological tool was semi-structural interviews with Greek film professionals (directors of the main distribution and exhibition companies, as well as researchers, academics, and even few film directors). One of the many difficulties was collecting financial data from the distributors. Studios companies archives are not available for research and big firm directors were very difficult to approach and very sceptical and attentive once the contact was established when it comes to economic figures of their company. This explains the fact that financial statistics concerning cinema in Greece do not figure on Eurostat's studies (CEE's main organisation for statistics in Europe) and Media Salles that publishes the "White Book of the European Exhibition Industry."

However, research from other disciplines in social sciences and literary theory has been proven to be extremely useful. I am referring to Gregory Jusdanis, Dimitris Tziovas and Dimitris Eleftheriotis, whose work concerning the role of Greek literature and cinema in the construction of national culture is very pertinent. Tracing back the genealogy of conceptual terms and concepts in cultural studies within the Greek context is quite problematic, as very often theories and concepts vary a lot from dominant theories in communication studies.

As Gregory Jusdanis has noted, Greece is epistemologically interesting because our assumptions about literature, art, modernism, the avant-garde, and postmodernism, which we believe to have at least a pan-European validity, do not necessarily hold true there. The example of Greece demonstrates how culture and time-specific these concepts are. (Jusdanis 1987: 71)

The term "popular culture" has many different and often contradictory meanings that makes it impossible to propose a strict and rigorous definition of the term. Therefore it is necessary to explore briefly the formation of the concept and its evolution in Greece. According to Tziovas the concept of popular culture in Greece has always been associated with the concept of tradition and the term folk culture.

"Certainly 19th century Greece's patterns of social stratification were different from those of Europe; the Greek middle class remained underdeveloped and lacked a clear awareness of its distinctiveness. Hence the contrast between high (written) and common (spoken) culture took another form: the conflict between ethnic life and local customs, on the one hand, and the foreign civilization of enlightened Europe on the other. The latter stood for the ideals of learning and progress combined, however with the threat of corruption. These conditions did not permit the emergence of the concept "popular culture". Only after 1920, when urbanization and industrialization manifested themselves intensely in Greece, did the term laikós politismós (popular civilization) appear sporadically". (Tziovas 1989: 324)
Gregory Jusdanis, tracing back the book trade—which is considered as as sign of an emerging literary public sphere-in Europe the 19th century, argues that conditions in Greece were not yet ripe for the emergence of a culture industry—neither the technological infrastructure nor a large enough market of potential readers existed. The task in Greece was still the creation of a national popular culture rather than a mass culture. (Jusdanis 1991, 157-158)

However, one could argue that the creation of a mass culture came inevitably with the coming of cinema, even though socio-economic conditions were not fertile for the construction of a national industry. Foreign films and productions played then a capital role in the formation of the future cinema culture for audiences. Regarding the projections of popular culture through cinema, the first Greek films associated elements of folk culture and popular traditions.

Greece’s strategic position between the East and the West, made that many of its most enduring cinematic representations have been an amalgam of different cultural factors. Thus, from the beginning, we see the expression of the two trends, which have dominated the Greek cinema and Greek cultural life in general until today. On the one hand, there is a leaning towards the modern achievements of western civilisation, its way of life and artistic models, and, on the other, an attachment to the eastern, Greek Orthodox tradition, to folk and popular values, customs, songs and dances, together with a distant idealised recollection of antiquity.

Naturally, the interaction or blending of these seemingly opposing elements would have an impact on that popular form of entertainment. A typical example of this dichotomy between the popular (hellenocentric) traditions and western cinematic characteristics can be found in the very early Greek productions. The first Greek feature film "Golfo" (1914) was an adaptation of the theatrical idyll written by Spyros Peressiadis (1894), which formed a wholly Greek genre called ‘fustanella films’. This kind of dramatic idyll (or bucolic drama) adopted the metre of the folksong and the traditional manners, customs and dress, particularly the Greek fustanella costume. Romantic, sentimental, moralistic, it idealized and prettified the rural past. The village, particularly the mountain village with its shepherds and flocks, stern patriarch fathers, fine young lads, pure morals, honour and virginity, forbidden love and tragic endings are themes, which are repeated from film to film. Furthermore the first production company -DAG Film- filmed extracts from Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound" during the Delphic Festival of 1927, created by the poet Angelos Sikelianos.

On the other hand there is a clear tendency to adopt to western models borrowed from American cinema themes. In 1929, the film "Astero" (directed by Gaziadis) became the first major success of the Greek cinema. The screenplay, attributed to the famous writer, Pavlos Nirvanas, was in fact written anonymously by Orestes Laskos, though it closely parallels "Ramona", a romantic tale among the Indians, written by Helen Hunt Jackson, already adapted three times for the screen; the first time by Griffith.

The Greek market through time

Tracing back the history of Greek cinema becomes necessary before endeavouring to analyse the actual cinema market. The first Greek cinema hall began screening a programme of French movies directed by Melies in 1901. By the end of the ’30s Greece counted 71 cinema theatres which projected mainly American Films. Cinema in Greece has had from its beginnings many difficulties organising and edifying the bases of a real industry. (Sifaki 2002b: 44-46) Just before the Second World War Greek production was
almost non-existent. The market was characterised by a multitude of companies, which offered -with some exceptions- until the 40s low quality products both technically and artistically. The first film that reflected personal artistic expression was Orestes Lasko's "Daphnis and Chloe" (1931). Laskos filmed the ancient idyll by Longus in a natural scenery, with amateur teenage actors but with remarkable poetic and visual quality.

A general perception is that beyond the objective difficulties and the absence of technical equipment, the lack of film education and studios, national archives and a flexible institutional framework, professionals (especially producers-investors) did not see a profit margin for producing films. Moreover, the majority of intellectuals and artists did not consider the perspectives that cinema as an artistic development could offer. Moreover the continual invasion of American and European talking films ousted the silent Greek films. The investment needed to install a sound studio made the first production companies such as DAG films to close down. During the following decade, the number of Greek films (shot in Egypt) was very limited. (Mikelidis in Demopoulos 1995: 43-44)

Furthermore American studios such as Fox Film, Metro Goldwyn Mayer and Warner Bros created very early on subsidiaries in order to exploit their films in Greece and controlled most of the central theatres in Athens. It becomes evident that American domination of admissions accustomed the public of urban cities to western models of film consumption.

During the Second World War, Germany imposed UFA's films, -a company that was under the control of the Third Reich-, a policy that applied in all the occupied countries. (see Kreimeir: 311-353) In Greece, the first thing that the German ministry of propaganda did was to ban American and European films (apart from some Italian and Hungarian) and to create a company named ironically "Hellas films" for the distribution of German films. However, film propaganda did not have great success in Greece while Italian and Hungarian films attained more admissions.

The general tendency to resist the spread of German influence was reflected in low attendance at German films. Audiences made clear their refusal to watch German and Italian films and sought encouragement and national unity in Greek entertainment. Filopopemin Finos, a man with exceptional technical and organisational talents showed great perseverance and managed to overcome all obstacles and to present the first complete, modern film: "The Voice of the Heart" (1942), directed by Dimitris Ioannopoulos, who also wrote the screenplay. It was made immediately after the great famine in Athens and was shown in March 1943, selling 102.000 tickets in the still occupied capital city.

Yet, after the war, Greece suffered a tragic civil war and from the 1950's onwards progresses towards democratisation and economic development despite the dark interlude of the colonels' seven-year dictatorship. Thus in the first quarter of this century conditions were not conducive towards the development of cinema which is commonly born in an urban setting with the necessary accumulation of capital and industrial technological organisation. (Kolovos: 339)

With the reorganisation of the industry, American studios like Warner Bros and Metro Goldwyn Mayer reopened their subsidiaries in Greece. However, gradually, some Greek distributors like Amolochitis-Voulgaridis, Anzervos and Skouras started to have contracts with the studios and control a number of theatres, a practice that is still valid today. Furthermore, Greek producers such as Pilopemene Finos, Antonis Zervos, Christos Spentzos, Mavrikios Novac, started creating their own studios, using well known theatre directors and creating home grown stars. (Mitropoulou 1980: 85-98) Characteristic genres of films -the melodrama, the romantic comedy, the comedy- began to take shape while

In the '60s Greek cinema started to flourish, with light musical comedies being the most popular "genre". The annual Greek cinema production as well as the number of admissions in relation to the population was impressive, while most Greek films were box-office success. During the 1960-61 season, 58 new films were shown and this number was to increase at a rapid rate: 82 in 1962-63; 93 in 1964-65; 117 in 1966-67 and the number did not fall below 90 until 1972. During the same period, cinema audiences increased dramatically, with over 100 million admissions each year, reaching a peak in 1968, when 137 million tickets were sold, almost fifteen tickets per capita. This number placed Greece among the most filmgoing countries of the world.

Cinema was the most popular form of entertainment for the Greek family especially in the lower classes. (Soldatos 1999: 87-110) Naturally, the boom coincided with economic growth and social progress. Greece began to go beyond its traditional farming economy, with light industry and services now employing more people than agricultural production. Towns grew, villages became modernised and the cinema spread everywhere. According to Eleftheriotis popular films of the '60s are domestic in all senses of the word. They are made for domestic consumption, set in a Greek setting and are usually about domesticity - the troubles and the pleasures of life within the extensive network of family, friends and neighbours. (Eleftheriotis 1995: 238)

Despite the high quality entertainment of foreign and, particularly, American films, it was the Greek films that won over a large proportion of the public. Audiences recognised themselves and their feelings, and above all, they understood the language, since foreign films were subtitled and not dubbed due to the high cost. Moreover, a certain part of the population had only limited education and lost a great deal of enjoyment through having to read the subtitles.

During the seventies there was an important "auteur" movement (known as the New Greek Cinema) which attracted international attention in terms of its artistic developments. This new generation, brought up on the politics of resistance, the ideological currents of Europe and the USA (particularly the events of May 1968 in France) and on innovations in film art aimed at the craftsman's individualisation. The "auteur" art, came in contrast to the tendency that dominated in the era of Finos, towards the production of a series of reproduced and standardised products. (Bakoyannopoulos in Demopoulos 1995: 65)

However, the Dictatorship of the Colonels in April 1967 sealed mouths, cutting short the "new wave" in the cinema, while the commercial cinema enjoyed the last years of its dominance.

However, the development of television combined with the inability of commercial cinema to remain competitive led to a drastic decline in both production and admissions in the 80s. The lower and working classes in the towns, together with the rural population, who had always been the main audience of Greek films, were now fascinated by this new and free form of entertainment. However, a small "cinephile" audience remained, mainly through the existence of film societies.

In the late '90s there was an increase in the number of admissions in Greece, following the trend in Europe. Nevertheless, the dominance of American cinema accounts for 90% of the distribution while only a few Greek movies are exported and are capable of box-office survival. The annual frequency per capita in Greece is the lowest in the EU, barely 1,2 admissions in 1999 (Deiss 2001); attracting 130 to 150 million spectators in the '60s, it fell two-thirds during the following decade (42 millions in 1980), and another two thirds in the first half of the 80s. Having reached its lowest point in 1993-1995 with only eight million admissions for ten million inhabitants, cinema going seems to have stabilised at around
twelve million entries (Forest 2001: 278). The American domination of the market is also one of the strongest of the EU, representing the major part of the Greek market: 86% in 1989, 92% in 1999. (Deiss 2001)

**The Greek film market today**

According to Papathanassopoulos in the recent history of Greek media, one can observe three phases of development. The first was in the mid-1980s and affected the newspaper market. The second came in the late 1980s due to the deregulation of the state broadcasting monopoly, which resulted in the creation of numerous private, national and local television channels and radio stations. In the mid-1990s, there was also an expansion in the magazine sector, and a proliferation of new magazines. (Papathanassopoulos, 2001: 508)

As far as the film industry is concerned, during the 90s many mutations have also occurred in the film industry. In this "reorganisation era" that characterises the Greek media sphere, media moguls (which hold huge financial interest which vary from telecommunications, tv channels, magazines, newspapers, shipping, refining, etc) are becoming more and more involved in the cinema industry. Most companies are vertical integrated, especially distribution companies which get more and more involved in the exhibition and production sectors. That was the result of the dynamic increase on Greek films box office gross at the end of the 1990s.

**Production**

Following the long stagnation of the Greek production, at the end of the 20th century begins a new era for Greek cinema. New releases (films, productions) have radically transformed the cinema market in terms of admissions. The film 'Safe Sex', made 1,3 million entries in 1999 and boosted admissions which increased by 100 percent (in ticket sales) This phenomenon is been considered by specialists as a breakpoint in the rebirth of Greek cinema, which seems to appeal to filmgoers more than ever after the sixties. Greek films are blossoming, according to the statistics compiled by Research International for the Greek Cinema Centre, in 2000, in five Greek cities. The overall picture from the poll indicates that the public is starting "to shed its doubts about Greek cinema", as comments GCC's (Greek Cinema Center) president Manos Efstratiadis, in the Herald Tribune. The optimism about the future of Greek cinema is very eloquent in the national press and distribution companies such as Prooptiki, Odeon and Spentzos invest in the production of Greek films.

The pessimistic approach of distributors towards Greek films is fading out. Thus, more and more distributors enter the production phase of a film in exchange for distribution rights. Distributors in Greece prefer now to get involved in a film early in its pre-production phase make decisions on the development of the film and plan ahead the marketing and promotion campaign. Furthermore, Greek television channels also begin to see a profit margin in film investing, which is a very important factor for their promotion and advertising that contributes heavily on the box office success of films.

**Distribution**

On the whole the distribution sector is rather monopolistic and very competitive. Most distribution companies have been established in many activities such as publicity, promotion, partnerships, exhibition, merchandise and video. Seven companies operate on
the whole market: Ama films, Odeon S.A, Prooptiki, Rosebud, Spentzos Films, UIP, Warner Roadshow. It should be also added that a non-profitable exists, organisation called Studio Parallilo Kukloma that distributes films to Film Societies, which have also expanded all over Greece.

The big three distribution companies, namely Odeon, Warner Roadshow and Prooptiki cover 80% of the annual film distribution gross revenues. They have exclusive distribution deals with big American studios for Greece and access to blockbusters, which are certain hits. UIP follows representing Universal, Paramount, MGM in Greece and distributing only their films. Spentzos Films is a medium sized distributor with close cooperation with Miramax. AMA films and Rosebud are two little distributors that insist on European cinema. They release European films on a percentage of 50% and 70% respectively of their releases.

It should also be added that every distributor has separate deals with different video distributors while most of their profit comes from Television Broadcasting. For the feature films, distributors hope to make a profit through the licensing of rights to Television channels. In video and TV distribution, American films are dominant. With the exception of the three public TV channels that broadcast European program, hardly ever does another TV channel buy European films.

Exhibition

All seven distributors have their own theatres or cooperate with certain theatres in Athens. They decide on which movie will open, on how many screens, and for how long, depending on the target audience. In the provinces, distributors have annual agreements with exhibitors that usually does not allow them to show films distributed by other companies. This is a common practice and even though distributors never admit it, it explains why certain films (especially European ones) are rarely projected outside the Greek capital.

In 2001, there were around 450 movie theatres in Greece (more than half of which in Athens) including 200 winter movie theatres and 180 open-air movie theatres of which only 70 are open all year. Cinema going in Greece is currently enjoying a renewed level of participation especially in the younger generation. According to the film professional's guide the international changes which brought audiences back to movie theatres have reached Greece. (Greek Film Centre 2001:129)

In the process of renovation most monoscreen (traditional) theatres divided up to accommodate extra screens in order to offer the public a wider choice of films, in terms of economy of scale. Moreover, some commercial enterprises (especially of consumer products and/or services) sponsor the renovation of cinemas by adding their brand name to that of the theatre. The first company to launch this concept was ASSOS ODEON (associating the Greek brand of cigarettes Assos and the media group Odeon who own more than 20 theatres all over Greece) offering the same products, services and related franchise products. Today this phenomenon is very current as commercial enterprises estimate that cinemagoers represent a common target for their products. Thus, names of banks like Alpha (Alpha Odéon, Alpha Card), cars like Renault, consumer products such as Nescafé, Lipton, Balladines, Refresh, telecommunications companies such as Ericssons, Philips, accompany the names of several cinemas. (Media Desk Hellas 2000:93)
Multiplexes: a complex phenomenon

The last few years, multiplexes are key players in the market and have revolutionised the exhibition sector. The notion of multiplex is relatively new in Greece. In 1997, the Australian multinational Village Roadshow inaugurated the first big multiplex, in the district of Marousi in Athens with 10 screens and a capacity of 2431 spectators, and "Village Entertainment Park" in 1999 implanted in 42 thousand m². Multiplex had an enormous commercial success considering that the number of admissions of Village, was about 1,200,000, in 1997, 1,400,000 in 1998 and 1,500,000 in 1999. In Athens, Village Roadshow possesses 50% of the market, with only 12% of the totality of cinemas. According to the evaluations of the direction of Village Roadshow, Village Entertainment Park has become in just a few years the most popular destination in Greece. During the first year of its opening, the biggest multiplex of the country attracted three and a half million Athenians, three times more than the amount of visitors to the Acropolis.

Over the last few months, the investments of the major multinational enterprises for the multiplexes have increased and their projects have been announced in the national press. The construction of more than 200 new cinemas all around Greece in the next three years have been announced in the economic press, which suggests the multiplication of these venues in the future. (Sifaki 2002a: 170) Other enterprises have come to claim their stake, for example the South-African enterprise Ster Kinekor which constructed a multiplex of eight screens in Thessaloniki in collaboration with the Greek company Alpha Odeon. The Dutch enterprise Europlex BV which is specialised in cinema exhibition in Europe, also created a subsidiary in Greece (Europlex Movies Hellas) and inaugurated its first multiplex in Patras "Veso Mare" in November 2001.

As regards questions linked to management, it is interesting to take into account how far exhibition companies have extended their activities into distribution, for example Village Roadshow's joint venture with Warner Bros. The connection between cinema and business activities is considered to be in synergy, and many socioeconomists bring to light the different strategies and marketing techniques that the firms adopt. While implementing vertical integration or multimedia strategies most multinational companies aim to expand on the global market in order to establish their presence world-wide and especially in the developing markets. (Creton 2001: 145-159)

However the end of 2002 saw many revolutionary changes with AOL Time Warner and Vivendi Universal reporting disappointing results and losing up to 75% of their stock market value. The paradox was that even though the studios had an amazing year in terms of profits it did not make much difference in the profitability of the group. This reflects the instability that integrated market structures face and gives a good lesson to managers that "bigger is not always better". (Sifaki 2003)

Nevertheless, the effects of all this on cultural production are profound. Cultural consumption became radically more complex as products vied with each other for consumer time and attention; and the different media became inter-linked with each other, so that the products of each medium were advertised and marketed in other media. (Hesmondhalgh 2002: 65) Indeed over the last ten to twenty years advertising has been reinforced in the cinema industry and nearly all the other cultural industries act as important vehicles for advertising too. Film studios make specific marketing plans and sign contracts of product placement for advertising which correspond to their audiences in order to promote their films. Product placement is both in the actual film itself and all over the activities that surround it. As we already mentioned traditional monoscreen theatres in Greece as well as open-air ones embraced this strategy in order to renovate their theatres, by placing brand names next to the name of the theatre.
We are experiencing an era where the term "spectators" is synonymous with "consumers" in an unprecedented commercialisation of our everyday lives as we are constantly bombarded by commercials, brands, consumer products, etc. (Sifaki 2003) Following the Habermasian tradition of 'public sphere' thinking, actual viewing practices reflect and reinforce more negative aspects of what Habermas described in his later writing referring to the pulverisation of the cultural sphere by the economy and the state, as the colonisation of the life-world. (Stevenson 2002: 52)

As Robert Allen emphasises, audience is as much a discursive concept as a social phenomenon. Individuals are not only solicited but constructed as audience members through industry attempts at marketing research, advertising, promotions, the decor of movie theatres, etc. (Allen 1990: 352) According to Allen there is a need to ask whom the industry and their agents have thought about when they talked about "the audience". What presumptions lie behind not only advertising and promotion, but also studio pronouncements and internal discourse regarding 'popularity', 'box office' and films that 'work' with particular audiences? (Allen 1990: 352)

In response to those questions, attention has been drawn to the way that executives and creative managers conceive their relationship with audiences. (Hesmondhalgh 2002: 244) It seems that there was an organised strategy to conquer the "global teen" as the teenager's taste is, according to economy specialists, universal. In reality, they make sure that it becomes universal. During the 1990s the youth market started to expand as industrials noticed the potential that it represented and its importance began to dawn on many in the manufacturing sector and entertainment industries. The most extensive and widely cited study of the global teen demographic was conducted in 1996 by the New York based advertising agency DMBet B's BrainWaves division, commissioned among others by Coca-Cola, Burger King and Philips. The "New World Teen Study" surveyed 27,600 middle-class fifteen-to eighteen-year-olds in forty-five countries. According to the results "despite different cultures, middle-class youth all over the world seem to live their lives as if in a parallel universe. They get up in the morning, put on their Levi's and Nikes, grab their caps, backpacks, and Sony personal CD players, and head for school" (Klein 2000: 118-119). The arrival of the global teen demographic is being considered as "one of the greatest marketing opportunities of all time".

The multiplex phenomenon can be explained and must be interpreted by taking into account those global strategies and marketing trends. One of the main reasons is that multiplexes are very popular among the young population. The return of younger spectators to the cinemas played a capital role in the renewal of the cinema industry in Greece and Europe in general and consequently in the success of multiplexes.

Furthermore, since young people are more culturally absorbent than their parents, they often influence their families and their family practices. This statement echoes the comments of the development manager of Village Roadshow in Greece according to whom "the purpose of Village Entertainment Park was to create a family environment, offering a wide range of services and products, a site which was necessary to the Greeks". Indeed, the multinational groups aim wide but at the same time segment the market. (Sifaki 2003)
Concluding remarks

Even though multiplexes in Greece have a short history which makes rather early for field research tracing their impact in comparison to traditional venues such as open-air cinemas, the national press commentary are quite revealing about the reception of this phenomenon.

For instance the financial paper "Imerissia"\(^1\) points out in the article "A new type of entertainment for the 21 century" that leisure practices are about to change radically in Greece in the 21 century which will provoke important changes in social practices. The author suggests that multiplexes are only the beginning of this transformation while theme parks (which range from technological parks, waterparks and shopping centres) already very "trendy" (the term is used in English) in the US are currently been constructed in Greece.

The article of Dimitris Rigopoulos which appeared in the Sunday widely read paper "I Kathimerini"\(^2\) (under the column Arts and literature) with the provocative title "Re patera den pame multiplexe?" (Hey dad, let's go multiplex) is also very characteristic of those changes in a more general social sphere. The title in itself and the language use reflect a change, which goes beyond cultural practices. It reflects radical mutations in interpersonal communication where a teenager addresses his father in the same way as he would a "mate". In this article Rigopulos talks about a "cloning" of those venues (multi-places) and cites four examples of such places which combine many activities such as coffee houses, cinemas, restaurants, concert halls, museums.

In the majority of these articles the arguments are finance orientated and the new venues are not presented in a negative way. On the contrary they are perceived as places of economic growth and potential which will provide more choice in terms of leisure facilities. However there are always allusions to western trends and models, identified in the language use without any explicit criticism of what is really at stake. This confirms our preliminary theoretical remarks, which make Greece an extremely receptive pole of western models of life. (Sifaki 2003)

What is really at stake in the face of a global consumer culture, is the expression of national cultural practices and characteristics, and consequently human and social relations and cultural values; the demolition of a public-social space and its replacement with a marketed, enclosed and private one where we -happy consumers- can buy it all in one. Multiplex culture with its enforced codes of style and consumption that can be found in all towns of the globe in an identical way, leave very little space for cultural diversity and expression. As Jusdanis (1987:91) remarks now that Greece has almost been absorbed into the European political mainstream, it would be interesting to observe, whether this country can enter modernity without the necessary split of morals, science and art into self-validating spheres.

Nevertheless the last couple of years open-air cinemas which were in dramatic decline for decades, show signs of rebirth. It should be added that the opening of multiplexes contributed indirectly to the increase of admissions in general, as cinema going became "fashionable" again. Furthermore, open-air theatres have managed to boost their admission by showcasing new releases during the summer.

In an article\(^3\) that examines the return of outdoor cinema, there is reference to multiplexes and a declaration of a Village Roadshow manager. Oddly, the rebirth of the open-air cinema is occurring during multiplex madness. Three movie theatres with a total of 35 screens have opened since 1997 in the Athens area. Yet Maria Batistatou, a manager at the 10-screen Village Centre in a suburb north of Athens, says there appears to be room
for all. “From what has been proven in the past three years, we have not been affected by the summer cinemas,” she said.

However, two years later (in 2002) Village Roadshow inaugurated a new concept in exhibition, named Village Cool. These are open-air cinemas marketed in an English (western) modern package. Therefore Village Roadshow opened three open-air cinemas in a year. If we consider the localisation of each theatre, (one in the city centre, one in the periphery and a last one in Pireas) the managerial strategy seems to seek the monopoly of summer admissions.

What is also interesting, is the Internet site of the company as it reveals eloquently this interaction between the local cultural practices and the global media culture. First through a collaboration with the historic cinema Aegli in the center of Athens, which dates back to the silent film era and reopened only in 2000.

"The open-air cinema "Aegli" at Zappeion which combines the characteristics of traditional open-air cinemas, in a total harmony with technological evolutions. If you add the traditional souvlaki and the snacks that one can enjoy during the projection of feature films in the comfortable seats, surrounded with tables, then you can be certain that your visit to Aigli-Village, will be unforgettable."

In addition the company created one open-air cinema in the suburb of Rentis (in Village Entertainment Park).

"We created a place that offers many possibilities (entertainment options) for the whole family, the new Village Cool, in order to change the scenery in open-air viewing experience. 400 seats, tables, relax and "loveseats", a big screen, and the system Dolby Digital which is brought in for the very first time in an open-air cinema, are about to change your summer nights. The revolutionary technology, the unique décor, are combined perfectly with the unique experience of the traditional open-air cinema, filled with the scent of summer flowers."

The last one is situated in Pireas and the site's description is quite anecdotal: "On the roof of the listed building of Mc Donald's (!!), with tables and the unique sound of Village Cool Cinemas. Its unique position offers a panoramic view in the whole Pasalimani area."

This new concept in open-air cinemas reveals that multinational companies are obliged to go along local cultural practices, which have a long established history in order to remain competitive. Consequently one could argue that there is something inherently Greek about open-air cinemas, a tradition of popular culture blended with standardised cinema going practices creating a particular viewing experience. However, in an era where tradition and popular culture is projected through the "souvlaki" and a Mc Donalds building is mentioned as listed, the consequences on the future leisure and cultural practices remain ambivalent.
References

Greek Film Center (2001) Film professionals guide, South Eastern Europe Cinema Network, Athens: GFC.
Notes

1 After the Second World War, Greece was under the tutelage of the British who sent their troops in order to "save the country from anarchy" which was succeeded by the United States who had a concrete political and financial role in the country during the civil wars.


Spentzos Films distributes on average 30 movies per year in 15 theatres. 'Vita e Bella' and Greek film 'Safe Sex'. The company is investing more and more in Greek film production. It distributes on average 15 films per year. It operates with a circuit of 8 theatres in Athens. The majority of films distributed are European films. Wincheste Films and Seven Arts. It distributes on average 30 movies per year. It does not distribute any European film. Only in the self-owned multiplexes, some screens are given to the exhibition of European films after working out a deal with other distributors. The group Odeon is one of the first Greek media groups in the cinema industry; present in production, distribution and exhibition.

Multiscreen, multiplex, megaplex: these are terms, which are frequently used for cinemas with several screens, which gradually established themselves, especially during the nineties. The most easily identifiable criteria for distinguishing the various types of movie theatres includes auxiliary services, such as car parks or refreshments, and the fact that they have been specifically designed to accommodate several screens. Although no official terminology exists as yet, from a practical point of view, wide consensus has been gained in the profession for the definition suggested by MEDIA Salles, according to which the term multiplex cannot properly be used unless the complex has at least 8 screens. It would therefore seem reasonable to establish the dividing line between multiplex and megaplex at 16 screens. - “White Book of the European Exhibition Industry ” (second edition, 1994, vol. II).

Those remarks emanate from an interview with the development manager of Village Roadshow in Greece Karvalis Georges, Athens, 05/04/02.


21 Marianthi Pelevani, "A new type of entertainment for the 21 century", Imerissia 12 January 2001 (in Greek)
22 Dimitris Rigopoulos, "Hey dad, let's go multiplex", I Kathimerini, Sunday 28 January 2001, 41-42. (in Greek)
23 Tongas Theodora "Rebirth of outdoor cinema" The Associated Press, 3 August 2000
24 See http://www.village.gr/village_cool.asp