



The country with just *one* cinema

In Benin spielen Netflix und Co. kaum eine Rolle – im Gegensatz zum CanalOlympia Wologuèdè, dem einzigen Kino im Land.

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MEDIUM AUDIO



Gina Prince-Bythewood's *The Woman King* (2022) brought Benin into the global public consciousness. Despite earning nearly \$100 million at the global box office, the film was controversially shut out of the Oscars, an exclusion that Prince-Bythewood referred to as "a reflection of where the Academy stands and the consistent chasm between Black excellence and recognition".

Cinema audiences around the world enjoyed the story of the Agojié, an army of elite female warriors from the Kingdom of Dahomey, as modern-day Benin was once known, largely unaware of how difficult it is for most Beninese to go to the cinema at all.

One of a kind

Benin has just one cinema — CanalOlympia Wologuèdè, located in Cotonou, the country's largest city. The cinema has enjoyed a monopoly since it was founded in 2017.

In the past, things were different. After 1960, the year that Benin gained independence from France, the country built its first cinemas. During the 1990s, however, they couldn't compete with video-rental shops and gradually closed down. "CanalOlympia was born out of a desire to give people access to quality cinema in a modern and innovative entertainment complex," says Floriane Deguenon, director of CanalOlympia Wologuèdè, Benin. With 14-metre screens,

Benin [be'ni:n]
 ► [wg. Aussprache]

box office ► Kinokasse

chasm ['kæzəm] ► Kluft

elite [i'li:t]
 ► [wg. Aussprache]

Beninese [,ben'i:z]
 ► [wg. Aussprache]

found sth. ► etw. gründen

compete with sth.
 [kəm'pi:t]
 ► mit etw. konkurrieren

rental shop ► Verleih

Viola Davis in *The Woman King*, which brought Benin into the public consciousness



The CanalOlympia in Cotonou enjoys a monopoly and attracts young audiences

“Watching Netflix is a privilege that many people in Benin don’t have”

3D projections and a modern sound system, the cinema offers a high-quality experience that attracts the crowds. The Cotonou site is part of the CanalOlympia network, which has 18 cinemas in 12 African countries.

Audiences at CanalOlympia Wologuèdè are predominantly young — not surprising in a country where the average age is under 18. The cinema programme reflects youthful tastes, with a selection of African films alongside blockbusters from America and France, which make up a catalogue of around 150 films per year.

The central location of CanalOlympia Wologuèdè in Cotonou attracts locals and residents of nearby cities, such as Porto-Novo, Godomey and Abomey-Calavi. “We generally install our infrastructure in working-class neighbourhoods or in other areas that are easy for everyone to access,” Deguenon adds.

Internet access

In a country where having internet access is not the norm, watching Netflix is a privilege that many people in Benin don’t have. A study by DataReportal found that only 29 per cent of Benin’s population were internet users at the start of 2022. As a result, it has been difficult for streaming services to succeed in Benin.

For most Beninese, television and DVDs are the only options. Films are shown on the national television channel of Benin, ORTB, and the country’s private channels: Canal3, Eden TV, Golf TV or TVC. ORTB allocated local films their own broadcasting-rights budget in 2019, but the private channels have no budget for the production or purchase of local films.

When advertising, CanalOlympia has to use both online and offline marketing. Street marketing, press, radio, television, posters and digital marketing are the preferred options in Benin, but other CanalOlympia outlets, such as those in the Republic of the Congo, even use town criers. The news of the release of *The Woman King* in Benin, in September 2022, was met with great interest. Tickets for the film were sold out for months at CanalOlympia Wologuèdè. “The feeling of belonging to this beautiful story was felt by almost all our cinephiles because it’s not just an entertaining film,” Deguenon says. “It’s also a work that sheds light on a part of our country’s history.”

The Beninese film scene

Benin’s only cinema also hosts film festivals, such as the Ciné 229 Awards and the Cotonou International Women’s Film Festival. The local film industry owes much to the existence of the Higher Institute of Audiovisual Training, which was founded in 2006. Beninese filmmakers have begun to receive international recognition, and the country is increasingly being chosen as a location for international productions, such as *Adú*, by Spanish director Salvador Calvo, and *Mami Wata*, by Nigerian director C. J. Obasi.

Despite such progress, the fact that the country has just one cinema might be good for the operators of CanalOlympia Wologuèdè, but it certainly limits the Beninese film industry as a whole. People who live far from Cotonou are left without easy access to a cinema, and all of the opportunities that films bring with them in terms of education, representation and understanding of the global media landscape.

predominantly
• überwiegend

allocate sb./sth. sth.
[ˈæləkeɪt]
• jmdm./etw. etw. zuteilen

broadcasting right
[ˈbrɔːdkɑːstɪŋ]
• Übertragungs-, Senderecht

purchase
[ˈpɜːrtʃəs] • Kauf

outlet
• Verkaufsstelle

crier • Ausrufer(in)

release [riˈliːs]
• Herausbringung, Start

cinophile
[ˈsɪnɔːfɪl]
• Filmliebhaber(in), Kinogänger(in)

shed light on sth.
• Licht auf etw. werfen, etw. näher beleuchten

host sth.
• etw. veranstalten

industry
• hier: Branche

owe sth. to sb./sth.
[əʊ] • jmdm./etw. etw. zu verdanken haben

director
[dɪˈrektə]
• hier: Regisseur(in)

operator
• hier: Betreiber(in)

in terms of
• hinsichtlich