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For more information about VEKAM
vekam.ku.edu.tr



IN FOCUS

A Rare Urban Research Center: VEKAM

The Vehbi Koç and Ankara Studies Research Center (VEKAM) stands out as a unique and unparalleled urban research center, renowned for its comprehensive and interdisciplinary knowledge base on Ankara and its environs. Professor Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, the director of VEKAM, shared her valuable insights regarding the current state and prospects of the center.





**Professor Filiz
Yenişehirlioğlu:
‘Throughout the years,
VEKAM has become the
primary reference center
for urban studies on
Ankara.’**



WATCH THE VIDEO

How would you describe VEKAM’s mission?

Founded in 1994, VEKAM has been operating as part of the Koç University’s ecosystem since 2014, supporting high-quality research and projects on Ankara, our capital city, and its environs. Throughout the years, VEKAM has become the primary reference center for urban studies on Ankara.

One of our key areas of activity focuses on building an extensive archive consisting of documents, photographs, ephemera, and maps related to Ankara and its environs and offering access to a research library of publications that support this archive. We also have a conservator tasked with reviewing all these valuable archival materials and taking the necessary measures to ensure their preservation for future generations. We aim to leverage the knowledge base we continue to build through our activities for cultural heritage conservation.

VEKAM operates in two buildings, each a grade two registered cultural asset reflecting Ankara’s traditional residential architecture.

Cultural heritage conservation is among our key objectives. As part of our efforts, we cultivate Ankara grapes in our vineyards and other plants native to the region in our gardens. We are also a member of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Türkiye Committee, in the sub-category of “Historical Houses and House Museums.”

Can you give us more information about VEKAM’s premises?

VEKAM is unique in terms of its facilities. Its two buildings host administrative offices and function as a private museum. The main building, designed as a traditional Ankara house, is decorated with memorability related to the late Vehbi Koç, the visionary founder of Koç University. The other building, the Ankara Orchard House, located just a ten-minute walk from the main building, is decorated with period furniture and pieces to highlight the transition from traditional to modern life in Ankara in the late 19th century. This is where we conduct our work supporting research activities and studies on Ankara and its environs and showcase the region’s cultural heritage.



What can you tell us about VEKAM's current work?

To share and spread our knowledge, we organize monthly conferences on Ankara or new research and methodologies as well as national and international symposiums on cultural encounters and civilizations in Anatolia or to raise awareness about cultural heritage among children. We also publish the results of these symposiums in book format and host exhibitions in various art galleries in the city.

At VEKAM, we promote research on Ankara through our publications. We take great pride in VEKAM Publications, which *Book Culture Life* magazine of the newspaper *Ekonomi* presented with the 2022 Corporate Publishing House Award. We also publish a peer-reviewed biannual journal, *The Journal of Ankara Studies*. Furthermore, we support a variety of research and projects on different

topics to disseminate information to a wider audience. Every year, we present a special award to a documentary on Ankara selected by the jury as part of the Ankara Film Festival's special screening program, which we sponsor.

As for our research and training programs, we also offer certificate programs like the recent Local Memory program on a new methodology. We organize such programs in response to the countless requests for advice or consultancy that we receive.

What strides toward digitalization is VEKAM making?

One of the key priorities in our work is the digitalization of our collections. We have some rare and valuable collections such as the 15-year archive of the Music Education School which later became the Ankara State Conservatory (Musiki Muallim Mektebi),





‘One of the key priorities in our work is the digitalization of our collections. VEKAM received a significant grant from the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme to digitize the archives of the Music Education School which later became the Ankara State Conservatory.’

established in the early years of the Republic, in the mid-1920s. We received a significant grant from the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme to digitize the archives as quickly as possible. As next year marks the centennial of the establishment of that conservatory, we intend to open these rare archives to the public in an exhibition in Ankara. I am very excited to share with you that we will organize a large-scale exhibition next October at the Çankaya Cultural Center in Ankara in partnership with the Collectors’ Association in celebration of the centennial of the Republic in 2023!

Are there any more projects dedicated to the centennial of the Republic?

Another project dedicated to the centennial of the Republic is a documentary on how Gençlik Park (Youth Park), a major urban undertaking of the Republic era, has contributed to social life and the arts in Ankara. As part

of our oral history studies, we also create documentaries on the people of Ankara or members of families who have made significant contributions to the city. These include a documentary on the Pembe Köşk (Pink Mansion) with invaluable contributions from Özden Toker, the daughter of İsmet İnönü, second president of Türkiye; short documentaries featuring interviews with people from Ankara’s influential families and noteworthy institutions like the Kınacızade family, Derman Pharmacy, and Tuğra Jewelry and Silversmiths; and a documentary titled “Keçiören Whistle,” drawing from a local language used among the people who once lived in the Keçiören district. All of our documentaries are available on YouTube.

How do you keep up with the ever-changing communication trends?

To keep up with the latest communication trends, we have launched a podcast series



focused primarily on young people and their relationships with Ankara. We host platforms and groups like Lavarla and Ankaraks, respectively, and discuss their activities in Ankara. The podcast has been very well received by listeners.

How do you evaluate donations?

The vast archives mentioned at the beginning of our interview receive priceless donations such as historical documents, objects, and books. We have started to create a digital database for art history research. Art historians who are friends of VEKAM donate their old diapositives, plans, and notes made during their surface surveys, contributing to a rich collection in our library.

We also have expanded the scope of this rich collection to cover the Central Anatolia region since the borders of Ankara have changed throughout history. For instance, Kayseri was previously a part of Ankara province according to the first state regulations issued after the 19th-century Reforms in the Ottoman era. In terms of administrative districting, Ankara was at one time the center of the entire Central Anatolian region. For this reason, we have acquired 100 books written in Karamanli Turkish, the traditional language of the Turkish-speaking Greek Orthodox people native to the region of Karaman. So, we continue to grow our archives and library, enriching them with the cultures and cultural diversity of Central Anatolia.

Can you give us information about the projects supported by VEKAM?

We are preparing to publish all of the materials that will be unearthed from the ruins of the ancient Roman city of Juliopolis in the Nallıhan district, where the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations and Hacettepe University's Department of Anthropology are

carrying out excavations. The findings will be shared with the academia.

The Brand Museum is another project we support. We turned the research of two scholars who studied the effects of museums on cities' branding efforts into a project in terms of the museums in Ankara. After they concluded a study last year, we organized a symposium on the topic. This year, we supported a project that studied the effects of social media on promoting museums and a city's branding efforts in light of the most-visited museums in Ankara. Once the project was completed, we organized a workshop on the topic with support from the Ministry of Culture and the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism on April 28.

On May 5-6, we will host a belated World Anthropology Day event, which sadly had to be postponed due to the February 6 earthquakes. Earthquake anthropology will be one of the topics the speakers will address during the event, with discussions on rebuilding the human and cultural connections disrupted by the disaster.

Every year, VEKAM accepts project applications, which are evaluated by a panel of experts. For instance, we currently support a project that studies how rural Ankara has evolved over time. In addition to supporting various projects, we also extend research grants. Among the research projects on Ankara and its environs submitted to us for consideration, several researchers are selected by a jury to receive funding. We announce these studies and their results annually.

Who visits the Center?

VEKAM is open to visitors every day except Sundays. In addition to individual visitors, we receive visits from organizations and institutions. We should add that we



enjoy visits from many local neighborhood associations in Ankara as well as schools that bring their students for educational purposes. Once, some architects came and performed sound measurements. On World Environment Day, young children were here to explore the gardens. During our symposiums, when we also host international visitors, the participants and members of the audience visit VEKAM.

Does VEKAM follow a specific model as an example?

VEKAM is a one-of-a-kind research center and so is its model. Besides the fact that not many urban research centers are affiliated with universities, this concept is relatively new in Türkiye. The late Vehbi Koç was a visionary who guided the establishment of VEKAM in 1994, pioneering this concept in Türkiye. This type of urban research center is rare even in Europe. Considering that museology is more prominent, research is generally carried out within the scope of museum activities.

What's next for VEKAM?

Our activities will continue within the scope of what has been summarized here. We plan to relocate VEKAM to Koç Han once the timing is finalized. Located in Ulus, Ankara, and designed by architect Ernst Arnold Egli, Koç Han was where Vehbi Koç registered his first company. The historical building is currently undergoing restoration. Moreover, a part of the apartment owned by the Koç Family may also be allocated for VEKAM to use. These future developments will help us grow VEKAM further and engage in more activities as we expand. We may create study spaces and host visiting researchers, both local and international, and even provide on-site accommodation for them. Once these plans come to life, the two buildings we currently use may be fully converted into museums and rearranged with different display methods and layouts to host various events.



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VEKAM in Numbers

(2014-2023)

A TEAM OF 12

ACTIVITIES

- 14 NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUMS
- 56 CONFERENCES
- 23 COLLOQUIUMS
- 20 WORKSHOPS
- 25 EDUCATION PROGRAMS
- 1 INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
- 18 RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS
- 6 HERITAGE TALKS
- 33 EXHIBITIONS
- 11 DOCUMENTARIES
- 9 PODCASTS
- 55 PUBLICATIONS
- 7 NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL AWARDS
- 21 PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY VEKAM
- 57 AWARDS PRESENTED TO RESEARCHERS

ARCHIVES AND CONSERVATIONS

15 DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

~70,000 DOCUMENTS IN THE ARCHIVE

~15,000 BOOKS

PASSIVE & ACTIVE CONSERVATION ON 20,481 DOCUMENTS

JOURNAL OF ANKARA STUDIES

THE REVIEWED JOURNAL OF VEKAM

21 ISSUES

177 ARTICLES

820 CITATIONS

READERS IN 97 COUNTRIES

To watch VEKAM's documentaries, please click.