# The Positioning of Culture Between Proliferation and Consumption: Polyvalent Cultural Centers in Ankara

## *Çoğalma ve Tüketim Arasında Kültürün Konumlandırılması: Ankara'daki Çok Amaçlı Kültür Merkezleri*

## Feyza TOPÇUOĞLU

Middle East Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Ankara, Türkiye
*Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Mimarlık Fakültesi, Mimarlık Bölümü, Ankara, Türkiye Ankara, Türkiye*
fyzpehlivan@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5690-205X

### Abstract

Culture exhibits a complex relationship that exists within architecture and urban environments, particularly in how space is manifested through diverse settings. This study explores the intricate interplay between culture and architecture within the context of Ankara's cultural centers. By examining the development of urban cultural spaces across six districts—Çankaya, Altındağ, Yenimahalle, Etimesgut, Keçiören, and Sincan— the study evaluates how these centers embody ideological influences and discourses in their contribution to the city's socio-cultural landscape. The research adopts a critical view of cultural spatiality, analyzing cultural coherence and inconsistencies in how cultural centers address the needs of citizens and reflect ideological narratives within urban culture. The study employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies within a comparative analysis that calculates cultural spatiality ratios and analyzes user feedback. This approach assesses the dynamics of cultural production, presentation, and consumption, revealing the disparities that exist in cultural representation and utilization. Findings highlight the polyvalent structure of cultural centers, emphasizing their role in navigating cultural representation, identity, and urban development.

**Keywords:** Cultural centers, Urban culture, Cultural spatiality, Ideology, Cultural coherence, Ankara

### *Öz*

*Kültür, mekânın farklı bağlamlarda üretimi açısından mimarlık ve kentsel çevrelerle karmaşık bir ilişki içindedir. Bu çalışma, Ankara'daki kültür merkezleri bağlamında kültür ve mimarlık arasındaki girift etkileşimi incelemektedir. Çalışma, Ankara'nın altı ilçesi—Çankaya, Altındağ, Yenimahalle, Etimesgut, Keçiören ve Sincan—genelinde kentsel kültürel mekânların gelişimini ele alarak, bu merkezlerin ideolojik etkileri nasıl bünyesinde barındırdığını ve kentin sosyo-kültürel yapısına nasıl katkı sağladığını değerlendirmektedir. Bu araştırma, kültürel mekânsallığa eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşmakta, kültür merkezlerinin kentlinin ihtiyaçlarına nasıl yanıt verdiğini, kent kültürü üzerinden meydana gelen ideolojik etkileri ve söylemleri nasıl yansıttığını analiz etmektedir. Karşılaştırmalı analiz kapsamında hem nitel hem de nicel yöntemler kullanılmakta; kültürel mekânsallık oranlarının hesaplanması ve kullanıcı geri bildirimlerinin analizi gerçekleştirilmektedir. Bu yaklaşım, kültürel üretim, sunum ve tüketim dinamikleri üzerinden, kültürel temsildeki ve kullanımdaki eşitsizlikleri kültürel tutarlılık üzerinden ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, kültür merkezlerinin çok işlevli yapısını vurgulamakta; bu merkezlerin kültürel temsil, kimlik ve kentsel gelişim süreçlerinde nasıl önemli roller üstlendiğini göstermektedir.*

***Anahtar sözcükler:*** *Kültür merkezleri, Kent kültürü, Kültürel mekânsallık, İdeoloji, Kültürel tutarlılık, Ankara*

## Introduction

Culture's capacity to change has become increasingly apparent, with tendencies for innovation, inclusion, exclusion, and expression emerging within culture as an upper structure that functions as a field of connectedness and an ordering of space through continuity and discontinuity in architecture (Lury, Parisi and Terranova, 2012). Historically, the public display of culture in spatial representation began with the world fairs of the 18th century which marked the first significant efforts to house exhibitions of culture and industry. By the 19th century, collections of art and culture were increasingly being displayed to the public, fostering national identity and heritage through the adoption of hybrid forms in urban environments (Bennett, 1989).

In the 20th century, visitable sites of cultural display gained prominence through the analyzing of artifacts, institutions, and customs in place-making. Since the 1980s, culture has emerged as a crucial factor in urban, and particularly in strategic planning, where it is utilized as a tool of display in the institutionalization of specific planning ideas in architecture which are aimed at engaging a genuinely mass audience (Krisch, 2019). Institutions have become deeply intertwined with culture, and this has made it challenging to quantify shared norms and conventions, or to record current discourses on culture (Foucault, 2005). This raises the question of how culture has become a heuristic term for 'the institutionalization and habituation of practices and ideas of a cultural character,' which is central to research in which local city governments are involved (Moran, 2014). Measuring the authority of culture on institutional grounds, especially though decisions made by municipalities, can be explicitly traced by examining figures displayed in public spaces (art museums, galleries, cultural centers, parks, ateliers, city streets, etc.) (Zukin, 1995). Since culture can be considered as a consumable unit, its associated meanings give the city a certain quality of spatial aspects which are reflected in a city's cultural image and status.

Cities with different cultural types embody distinct spatial identities upon various scales (Hillier, 1989). As defined by Aldo Rossi, the city is 'architecture's big other,' as it carries the infrastructure of culture as a process and a raw material (Rossi, 1984). The city can, therefore, be understood as an object that encompasses its entire cultural complexity. The material form is an intrinsic aspect of a city's spatial existence; while culture marks a human-made sense of place and reflects a human-scale struggle in which culture can be measured in terms of spatial existentialism (Zukin, 1995; Hillier, 1989).

Cultural centers emerge as effective and shared cognitive mediums in which cultural discourse in architecture reveals ideological reality. Cultural centers are significant institutional spaces within cities that have been developed under the hegemonic power of culture, and that become maneuverable under legal administrative control and supervision. This means that cultural centers can be considered 'archetypical focal points' within the urban cultural contact zone that serve as commonly encountered public spaces in everyday urban life (Madanipour, 2016). In the 21st century, cultural centers have been assigned the mission of nurturing a local culture and reconciling political interaction. Institutions usually tend to utilize such projects to reveal historical and cultural connections of the city implicitly in a physical space that may be unfamiliar or antithetical to society's culture and may also disproportionally pander to such perceived connections. The result is that building programs and types cannot be specifically identified. It is assumed that in such representations, which may be large or small, there is a specific visible character due to the many decisions taken in the execution of the model in question (Temple, 2012). These representations reflect the prominence of a particular definition of culture as contemporary, and such spatial character is broadened through numerous representative case studies.

This study critically analyzes the rapid proliferation of cultural centers in Ankara by focusing on architectural forms, spatial representation, and sociocultural significance. It examines how these centers' embodied identities, shaped by municipal decisions, influence their spatial and functional characteristics. The study evaluates selected cultural centers as explicit manifestations of the urban culture shaped by dominant ideologies and sociopolitical forces. By employing six different approaches to cultural displays in architecture, the study examines their cultural coherence within different urban contexts in Ankara's central districts: Çankaya, Altındağ, Yenimahalle, Etimesgut, Keçiören, and Sincan. The study also investigates how these centers transition from production to consumption through new proposals, manipulations, and transformations, thus reflecting their evolving roles in contemporary urban environments.

## The City of Ankara in the Urban Cultural Context of the 21st Century

Ankara, the capital city of the Turkish Republic, has a mix of cultures due to rapid immigration and diversification, and this is reflected in the cultural projections that exist in the urban space. This intersection of different cultures in different districts creates a totalitarian sum of urban culture that enables new adaptations and contributes to cumulative change in the existing culture (Alkan Gökler et al., 2020). As a symbol of Republican values, Ankara emerged as a modern city after the 1920s, thus accelerating the transformation and formation of its urban culture. The city was intended to be a model for other cities and to be distinguished by its urban spaces (Bozdoğan, 2001; Batuman, 2013). Right from the foundation of the Republic, the mission was to shape urban culture with a determination to create a "capital city identity" with urban architecture in which the modernization of the city expressed its foundations through the creation of a common culture.

Ankara today expresses a fusion of state ideology, Anatolian culture, and contemporary values, all of which are intertwined with the political culture that shapes the urban lifestyle and behavior of the citizens who have adopted this culture (Tekeli, 1994). The city's constructed environment, which has been shaped by a plurality of cultures, represents a complex and multidimensional urban culture in which the discerning of cultural and spatial dynamics can be challenging. New cultural structures have been integrated to foster the awareness of citizens and establish a distinct cultural identity to promote regional development and create a cultural-economic value chain. With its intellectual capacity, Ankara effectively mirrors the urban culture of its residents, many of whom are civil servants (Oktay, 2009). As for cultural structuring, Ankara is second in Turkey only to İstanbul in terms of the clustering of cultural industries and spaces (Güçlü et al., 2016). The city has been shaped by emerging cultural influences driven by neoliberal globalization, and these foster diverse governance models amidst its irregular urbanization. These influences also shape future projections for cultural districts, thus reflecting the varied ideologies of urban land use politics and the diverse approaches to municipal planning and implementation in central districts.

Ankara remains between resources of identity in the execution of the cultural planning and policymaking which politicize culture as a management tool by the authorities. These measures aim to exhibit culture-led and cultural-experience-oriented urbanization (Moran, 2014).

Multiple stratifications of divergent and multilayered cultures can be observed in a city's spatial layout in which various interpretations and projections of cultures intersect (Lefebvre, 1996). The emplacement of culture within the city generates long-standing (historically) and widespread (cross-culturally) patterns that can be modified through arguments or policies aimed at achieving heterogeneity and overcoming the tendency to cluster (Rapoport, 2016; Sennett, 1970). The dynamics of urban culture are shaped by different ethnic groups and classes, economic activities, and the division of labor, all of which contribute to the inherent heterogeneity and plurality of the city.

The city-building boom experienced by Ankara, particularly after the 1980s, created an urban sprawl which accelerated the transformation of social and spatial practices and culture, as well as fostering the emergence of tactical cultural spaces within the urban dialogue that were either in coherence or conflict with the integrated urban fabric. This means that Ankara occupies a turbulent ground between a cosmopolitanism shaped by its diplomatic relations and a conservative identity. The material expressions of urban symbols within the city reflect a blend of pre-Islamic Anatolian roots, Islamic figures, and national identities, as well as post-modernist, structuralist, and high-tech elements. These symbols constitute an eclectic architectural mix that generates tensions within the city's modern image, and are particularly evident in its public spaces and governmental buildings (Çınar, 2007).

The dialectic between the city and its culture aligns with the historicity, everyday belongings, collective goods, a revival of humanistic values and norms of traditional culture, power representations, political symbols, and multiple discourses, all of which become manifest as a cultural struggle, creativity, and criticism in the urban setting (De Frantz, 2011). As such, plurality and the collective association of civil society with the city—rooted in localized signifiers and specific institutionalized meanings—represent urbanity and reflect a gradual process of cultural maturation.

The resident cultural structures of the past have allowed the proliferation of other culture-specific infrastructures, thus allowing the city to observe how cultural layouts

and grids are embedded in multiplicities of forms and demarcate the lives of the increasing urban population. However, economic considerations and forces within the construction sector have gradually impacted Ankara by transforming the city into a massive cultural, educational, industrial, and commercial capital. This transformation has underestimated the city's urban historical and socio-cultural memory and consciousness in the competitive political display arena, and has instead made architecture a vehicle for investment in flagship projects. The result has been improvements in the city's cultural-commercial sector between the 1980s and 2023, and the goal in Turkey's first century is for growth within different branches of marketing culture (Erdentuğ and Burçak, 1998; Sağlamtunç, 2005).

## Cultural Placemaking in Turkey via Atatürk Cultural Centers

The term 'cultural center' emerged after World War II to refer to a new model of contemporary institutional architecture. The concept was initially conceived as the physical embodiment of Western welfare-state cultural policy, and originated in Britain and France before spreading worldwide, particularly in non-Western countries, where it became a prominent cultural model (Yiu, 2022). This new model facilitated the democratization of culture, evolving from the concept of 'Houses of Culture' to a series of 'Cultural Centers' that made cultural events more accessible and widely popular throughout different nations. However, this process of democratization was disrupted in 1968, beginning with an architectural shock known as the Beaubourg effect, and exemplified by the Pompidou Center, which redefined cultural practices as being part of a public service model (Fleury, 2014). Baudrillard associated the Pompidou Center with cultural fission and political deterrence, noting the widespread misunderstandings and cultural mystification of the masses (2005). Massey further critiqued this institutional model, framing it within the context of spatial hegemony as a critical discourse to highlight political and cultural underpinnings (2005). There then followed a dialectical process of political and cultural production in which hegemony was reinforced while counter-spaces of false cohesion rooted in socio-spatial relations were simultaneously created (Bower, 2016). Building on this process, strategies for cultural centers have been adapted to the city's cultural context. These strategies have been shaped by the politics, history, decision-making processes, spa-

tial practices, and modes of interaction of the specific communities involved.

Cultural centers are embodied as benchmarks compared to the best practices of cities, with other figures representing the basis for developing policies in critical areas with cultural amenities. The building of culture is considered significant as it is required to supply artistic and full-service attempts in the serving of cities. This built philosophy is based on sociocultural interaction and exchange, instead of the collecting or sophisticating of actual artifacts in museums, theatres, galleries, and so on. Exhibitions and performances for different branches of fine arts, such as plastic and performing arts, conferences, and other components of minor arts and handicrafts, are held. In these events, the buildings themselves promote urban identity through the hosting within architectural spaces, such as halls, exhibition corridors, and areas for fine arts, music, opera, and ballet. In this way, buildings become more than merely a venue for artistic activities.

The manipulation of the generic and specific perspectives of a culture's proposition within a place-specific location creates a paradox of culture in a black box, in which the specificity to the city is re-questioned (Hofstede, 2001; De Frantz, 2011). This "semantic confusion between the concept of culture and its reflections on the spatial practice" has resulted in spatial incompleteness (Basa, 2018, p. 223). Culture's transmission to space causes fragmentation, perceived as a hyperreal culture among members of the community.

Architecture today is being undermined by three cultural tendencies: the commodification of buildings, the self-defeating pursuit of novelty, and the dominance of marketable images (Pallasmaa, 2007). Cultural centers are often viewed as spatial constructions representing a distinct model shaped by economic and political forces, and which incorporate a particular culture's practices, institutions, and material elements.

A culture's role in promoting architectural identity involves synthesizing various cultural elements into a unified product within a cultural venue. Such venues, which include multi-purpose halls, foyer areas, conference rooms, art galleries, workshop spaces, libraries, and ateliers, serve as converting sites where the masses are apprenticed into the spectacle of culture (Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002). This process is described as an "agglutination of culture as an automatic agglomeration of masses,"

and is characterized by the ambiguity that arises from the production of space through a "simulation and hyperreal version" of culture (Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002, p.21). As urban culture strives to coexist within the centrality of experience, it must navigate definitional contests and highlight the diverse emergence of cultural centers as a problematic discourse between cultural production and consumption. In response to the city's functional, economic, and cultural realities and demands within the production-consumption cycle, architecture has assumed another responsibility: defending the historicity, authenticity, and continuity of culture (Pallasmaa, 2007).

The spatialization of culture creates a cultural overload that places certain responsibilities on architecture. Cultural scarcities occur when attempts are made to embed urban culture within the urban landscape through specific technology that is compatible with the notion of culture. One can observe and comprehend this dilemma in the formation of cultural centers in Turkey.

There is no doubt that cultural centers occupy a critical position in ongoing debates where municipalities, architects, planners, and public administrative groups compete to control the spatialization of cultural formations. Turkey has 94 cultural center projects nationwide, including the pioneering projects of Atatürk Cultural Centers (ACCs). The construction of ACCs began with the ideological mission of creating 'culture palaces', which became one of the key ideological spaces for the development of a new national identity following the foundation of the Republic (Ganiç, 2016). ACC projects are intentionally designed to be monumental entities within urban cores.

### İstanbul Atatürk Cultural Center

The architectural concept for the first cultural center project appeared in the İstanbul construction plan of French architect and urban planner Henri Prost between 1936 and 1937. Prost proposed transforming the Topçu Barracks and surrounding cemeteries into a park and constructing an opera house in Taksim Square, suggesting that the area be designed by the French architect, Auguste Perret. However, the project was not realized due to World War II. Following the war, the opera house project was designed by architects Feridun Kip and Rükneddin Güney, with its foundation being laid on May 29, 1946. However, due to a lack of funding, the project could not be completed and was handed over to the Ministry of

Public Works and Settlement in 1953. Construction resumed in 1956, based on a new design by senior architect and engineer Hayati Tabanlıoğlu (Hasol, 2022). After many struggles and conflicts in the project, current initiations aim to host performances by the State Opera and Ballet and the State Theatres (Bozdoğan & Akcan, 2012).

The Atatürk Cultural Center (ACC), a project that underwent several name changes throughout its contentious history, was initially opened as the 'İstanbul Culture Palace', and was one of the important examples of modern architecture and cultural spaces in İstanbul. The building was designed as a clear and straightforward rectangular prism, adopting international trends of 1950s architecture, and was completed in 1969 (Tabanlıoğlu, 2013). Located in Taksim Square, İstanbul's most famous area, ACC was considered a magnificent construction due to its spatial quality and housing of opera and ballet within a cultural center. Unfortunately, the building was plagued by numerous diplomatic problems related to its public service throughout its construction. It finally opened in 1978, following extensive renovation after a major fire, under the name 'İstanbul Atatürk Cultural Center' (the building is now more commonly referred to by its abbreviated name: 'İstanbul AKM') (Figure 1A and 1B). Following the accident, while Tabanlıoğlu did not make any changes to the exterior façade, a series of innovations were implemented in the interior (Ganiç, 2016). The building is now a part of the city's cultural life through its embracing of culture and has become one of the custodians of the city's social-cultural memory.

In his absence, the urban spaces of Turkey represent Atatürk, thus symbolically sustaining Turkish collective identity and memory (2015). The ACC in İstanbul stands at the edge of one of the city's most significant areas, both in name and function, which embodies the public memory of the Republic and its principal founder. This makes the image of ACC both sustainable and memorable and serves as a cultural template for other spaces in Turkey. The İstanbul ACC includes a 1,317-seat Great Hall, a 530-seat concert hall, a 206-seat movie theater, a 196-seat chamber theater, and a 132-seat Aziz Nesin Stage, as well as art galleries, workshops (including carpentry, forge, paint, and tailor shops), a rehearsal hall, and decor and costume warehouses. The constructional characteristics of these facilities make their practical usage well-suited for both cultural and artistic productions (Ganiç, 2016).

***Figure 1A and 1B.*** ACC İstanbul exterior front facade in 1977 and in 2023.
Source: Tabanlıoğlu, 2013 and AKM, n.d.

Over the years, the İstanbul ACC has played a crucial role in documenting urban culture and serving as a carrier of social memory in its brutal aesthetic via the locational advantage that makes the building a central part of many events and political demonstrations in Taksim at the heart of the city. In fact, the İstanbul ACC has often been the topic of political debates itself, with new proposals and decisions by local authorities creating complications and memory losses that have led, from 2009 to its reopening in 2021, to alteration in the architects' and urbanites' perceptions of the new building via restoration and reinforcement through protection, abandonment, isolation, and reconstruction.

Such changes in the understanding of a cultural space reflect the evolving cultural structure of the city, of which this is a signature project, potentially influencing the popularity and significance of other urban public spaces. As a result, both past and present urban renewal projects view the İstanbul ACC as a polyvocal space that determines future circumstances, specifically in the context of cultural centers. In its rebuilding, and through consideration of the periods when the structure was initially built, rebuilt, and rebuilt again, the İstanbul ACC raises many questions and dilemmas relating to its influence on other cultural structures. These issues pertain to consideration of whether the building remains an inseparable part of collective memory through its diverse uses and rich cultural layers from different eras, and implications relating to ambiguities in spatial functionality and determination in cultural centers across Turkey.

## Ankara Atatürk Cultural Center

The area selected for the second cultural center in Ankara reflects its transformation, having more than doubled in size from when it was initially planned under the Jansen Plan, as one of the first planned urban textures of the Republican era. The new cultural center project began as part of an urban transformation project entitled the 'Ankara History-Green-Culture-Recreation Axis'. This was an integration endeavor to unify the city's historical elements with the Republican era's Ankara, as well as to address the lack of green space, by creating a green corridor starting from Atatürk Forest Farm and extending to the city center, thus encompassing the Hippodrome, 19 May Stadium, Youth Park, Sıhhiye Square and so on. The axis, which included the Atatürk Cultural Center, envisioned an open urban space featuring recreational areas for cultural activities and sports facilities suitable for different seasons, thus providing a vibrant hub for the city's residents.

However, the axis proposal could not be realized due to ownership issues in the planned area. In 1980, the Hippodrome area was declared as the first zone of a five-region urban area in which Ankara's sports, recreation, green, culture, and art spaces were envisioned as an integrated whole. The area was intended to meet the capital's need for a cultural center, as stated by the Ankara Municipality in 1954 (C. Erkal and F. Erkal, 2006). The Hippodrome served as a venue for ceremonies and parades that reinforced the sense of national unity from the 1950s to the 1970s. As a key element of modernization associated with

the 'urban elite,' the proposal brought vibrancy to the city through horse races and represented Ankara's modern lifestyle (Basa, 2016).

In reality, the project's implementation of the area that had become an undefined urban void during the September 12 Military Coup devolved into a 'national comedy' due to bureaucratic inefficiency (Özgönül, 2010). As a result of high cultural and architectural demands in the capital city of Ankara, the ACC was finally located in the old Hippodrome area and constructed between 1981 and 1987 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Atatürk's birth. The building was designed by Filiz Erkal and Coşkun Erkal and was opened to the public in 1987 (Erim, 1992). The Republic Era Museum, housed within the ACC, serves as the building's focal point and is designed as an independent construction that features a hierarchical order in both plan and section, thus symbolizing Turkish culture. The building's infrastructure is deeply rooted in Turkish cultural heritage, and commemorates Atatürk through its modern art gallery, museum, library, and workshops. The ACC's exterior walls were designed to convey a sense of unity, symbolizing a complete structure that rises to the sky and is destined to endure into the future (Figure 2A and 2B) (F. Erkal and C. Erkal, 1989).

ACC preserves Atatürk's principles for the future in creating cultural infrastructure with its components, such as architectural physical and aesthetic characteristics. However, there is a need to address the incompleteness of surrounding structures and landscaping in the area to capture and understand the complete vision as "ideal and monumental gestures of a certain national or cultural virtue," as symbolized by the truncated pyramid design (Basa, 2018, p.241). The enhancement of the ACC is diplomatically challenging due to the unfinished state of other complementary structures, making it a focal point of sociopolitical and cultural conflict, and the project is frequently debated in Turkish academia (Basa, 2018). The ACC currently stands as a solitary cultural center, embodying new assigned meanings of culture in a highly symbolic manner. Yet, due to administrative constraints, the project has not been enhanced with additional intellectual and artistic facilities, such as museums, libraries, art exhibitions, or performance spaces.

The center's abstract truncated pyramidal form functions as a representational space that heuristically encapsulates the cultural attributes of other incomplete urban facilities, thus uniting various cultural elements. The tension between the ideal representation of modern, national characteristics and the urban-political diversity of the populace imbues the ACC with a multifaceted character, thus creating a cultural space that embodies multiple societal and cultural identities (Basa, 2016).

After 2019, the ACC became a platform for the promotion of a commodified architectural product as its interior and exterior surroundings became a fairground in which souvenirs are sold. Furthermore, its spatial existence has been transformed into a commodity, reflecting arguments tied to an urban space being shaped by state ideology, which particularly relates to the concept of the
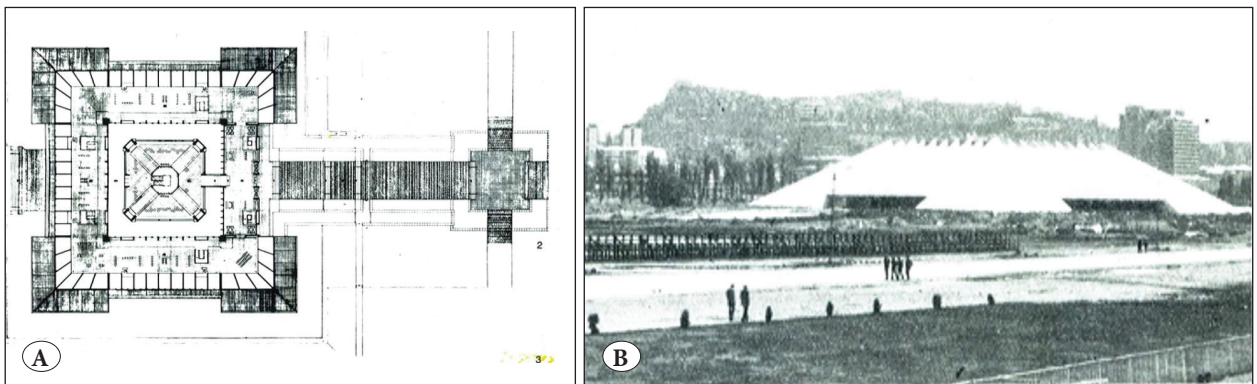


**Figure 2A and 2B.** The ground floor plan and elevation of ACC in Ankara.
Source: F. Erkal and C. Erkal, 1989.

Nation's Garden (*Millet Bahçesi*). The land has become a topic of debate, and opposing opinions were already being voiced even before its construction began. It has been emphasized that the land chosen for the garden is unsuitable for such a project and warnings have been given that historical structures and formations of significance would be lost due to such an implementation, which was felt to be against the nature of the monumental embodiment of past infrastructures. The construction of the Atatürk Cultural Center Nation's Garden aligns with the demolishing to rebuild, the reopening of developed areas for construction activities, the auctioning of non-commodified spaces, the attracting of investment to urban sections, and the pursuit of profit and economic returns.

Today, Turkey has new proposals, transformations, and even destructions of cultural centers which bear the name Atatürk Cultural Center, as well as the proliferation of cultural centers which carry significant names that are important in the nation's development. The manipulative influence on the masses under cultural and ideological subjugation suggests that culture is "happening elsewhere and nowhere" (Leach, 1997, p. 202). However, the ACCs' mission of integrating national ideals with cultural encounters enriches the cumulative texture of local urban culture—a unique quality that cannot be replicated by other models, even if multiple such centers are constructed.

## Methodology

In this study, cultural centers are identified site by site. The first step is to identify and select cultural centers in the districts of Ankara for analysis following qualitative research on proliferation and consumption. This analysis involves conducting comprehensive and comparative survey research of all existing cultural centers, and compiling a list of the centers located in each district by collecting architectural drawings from the municipalities and architectural companies. The selection of the buildings is unique and meaningful in that their names are significant key figures deliberately chosen to specify the ruling ideology, as well as their diversity in the refining and elevating of design elements via symbols and images while showcasing the cultural activities and normative codes in the respective districts.

The study analyzes the naming practices of cultural centers in terms of power, ideology, and space. This involves identifying the prominent figures after whom the centers are named, and examining the political affiliations

and ideologies associated with them. The characteristics of each selected cultural center are analyzed by examining their spatial layout, architectural design, size, facilities, and amenities, while considering the surrounding neighborhood's site plan. The study's cultural coherency evaluation is based on local cultural development strategies which include three elements: activity, form, and meaning, as well as whether places of dynamism are created or not according to where culture is produced and consumed. The activity dimension assesses the cultural, social, and economic activities facilitated by the cultural centers; the relationship between physical space and cultural activities examines the form dimension, while the meaning dimension explores the centers' historical and cultural significance and connection to the local district's identity and policies.

The second step is a quantitative assessment to measure the spatiality of each cultural center. This involves calculating the ratio of culturally constructed spaces to the total floor area of the buildings. The quantitative measures of cultural spatiality are closely tied to elements of cultural coherence, mainly through *activities* that reflect cultural practices, traditions, and narratives tied to district identity. These are expressed through the *form* and layout of the buildings' multilayered patterns of daily life, political orientation, and, most importantly, cultural sensitivity in exhibition halls, theater halls, foyers, ateliers, etc., and other socio-cultural spaces dedicated to cultural activities. However, service and circulation areas are excluded from the calculation of the cultural spatiality ratio due to the fact that, in some cultural centers, spaces dedicated to cultural activities are not explicitly defined in the plans or observed during site visits, making their inclusion more indicative of indirect cultural functionality rather than direct cultural functionality. Local customs and traditions play a significant role in shaping these culturally defined spaces, in which the preferences and needs of district residents drive participation. These spaces, provided by local municipalities, respond to the area's social dynamics, often functioning as event-based sites (e.g., celebrations, political activism, delegate meetings, performing arts and displays, and promotional days) that enhance cultural relevance and usability, and are further supported by the presence of an evening economy (Montgomery, 2003).

Participation levels and the use of these spaces can vary across the ideological spectrum, with national, liberal,

and conservative tendencies differing along left- to right-leaning perspectives (Santolini, 2020). These ideological nuances influence specific land-use practices and the considerations of time and place, as shaped by the design decisions of cultural centers that impact how the *meaning* of design appreciation and style are crucial for the sense of place and progress. The extent and variety of cultural venues and events are critical in promoting diverse cultural activities and offer numerous opportunities for engagement and interaction. These dynamics are contingent upon district stability and integrity, and align with the spatial representation of ideology and politics. This may lead to prejudiced perceptions and political stances by local citizens on the identity and imagery of the six case study areas. Consequently, coherence to spatiality measures characterizes cultural centers within different districts of the designated land-use, both primary and secondary, of specific cultural centers, thus reflecting and supporting the usability and conditions of culturally driven architectures. This measurement provides insights into urban cultural appropriateness by examining the legibility of cultural venues in terms of various scales. This is done through recognizable patterns and complementary uses identified in the spatial distributions, which either align with or oppose the functions of activity, form, and meaning.

As a third step, the study considers whether the adaptations of various approaches to spatial culture, rooted in district community development, align with user aspirations. This alignment is assessed through an analysis of comprehensive critical summaries of online overall feedback from Google Reviews on the six buildings spanning the past five years, with particular attention given to striking online responses in both positive and negative reviews which consolidate cultural coherency.

Finally, a comparative analysis is conducted to identify similarities, differences, and patterns among the cultural centers in different districts of Ankara. This analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of monitoring cultural centers in the city.

## Monitoring of Cultural Centers in six Districts of Ankara

Ankara hosts diverse numbers of cultural centers reflecting, in terms of both number and quality, the distinct identities of its various districts and their adaptability

to different public spaces. Within this cultural agglomeration, cultural centers are often named after significant figures in Turkish history and literature based on place-specific scenarios (Cerreta, Inglese and Manzi, 2016).

The use of John Montgomery's three sets of elements are an extremely useful way of monitoring Ankara's cultural centers adaptation to urban cultural patterns, particularly those interrelated with cultural dimensions in cultural gathering spaces. According to Tafuri's critique, architecture's complicity in reproducing ideological power can be directly observed in how cultural centers integrate into the urban fabric where architecture is blended into the urban sprawl. The fragmentation of cultural centers in Ankara—manifested in the diversity of their uses, architectural styles, programming, and signal meaning—reflects Tafuri's idea of architecture as being a provisional sign system (Tafuri, 1969). In such activity, which encompasses economic, cultural, and social venues for a variety of events, makes the centers new cultural epicenters of institutional experimental practices that mediate between the competing demands of the districts, such as local traditions versus globalized cultural practices, or high art versus popular entertainment; the second being form, as it refers to the relationship between buildings and spaces, thus contributing to a fine-grained, attractive, and permeable built environment; and the third being meaning, which involves a sense of place—both historical and cultural—that helps build the identity of an area and enhances signifiers that increase knowledge. These elements can be used to evaluate cultural centers in different districts of Ankara. The optimization of cultural centers is achieved through spatiality, physical aspects, and social factors within the built environment, as well as the perceptions of urbanites of urban cultural appropriacy. Cultural centers can only thrive within a long-term cultural production-consumption cycle in which the complexity of cultural activities is crucial to sustaining their existence (Montgomery, 2003).

In Ankara, cultural centers in the central districts of Çankaya, Altındağ, and Keçiören are predominantly closed and closely integrated with the old city center (Özgen and Sarı, 2021). Other event-based cultural spaces have also emerged within the municipalities of Yenimahalle and Etimesgut, where urban development plans have driven the city's expansion toward the southwestern corridor (Günay, 2012). To the west, the Sincan district is also part of this cultural value chain and urban sprawl,

contributing to the cultural economy and fostering a holistic structure that highlights the significance of owning and maintaining cultural centers as part of the city's promotion strategy in which cultural venues cater to a variety of scales and functions.

The districts governed by different municipalities have strong relationships between power and ideology, and the naming of spaces is deliberately chosen and characterized by cultural center formations in which cultural trademarks often become points of contention and competition. In the Çankaya and Yenimahalle districts, which are well-known for left-wing opinions, cultural centers are named after figures like Nazım Hikmet Ran, a modern Turkish poet popular in leftist circles, and Zülfü Livaneli, a Turkish musician, writer, and politician. Conversely, in the right-wing-ruled districts of Altındağ and Keçiören prominent figures such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, a Turkish poet, novelist, playwright, and Islamist ideologue, and Neşet Ertaş, a celebrated Turkish folk musician, songwriter, modern ashik (troubadour), and a virtuoso of the traditional Turkish instrument *bağlama*, have been chosen. In Etimesgut and Sincan, where far-right Turkish Islamist influences prevail, the local municipalities also reflect their stance in the naming of cultural centers. Additionally, other cultural buildings bear the names of historical figures such as Dede Korkut Ata, a writer of Turkish epic literature, and Ahi Elvan, a philosopher from the Seljuk period.

Labeling cultural spaces in districts is devoted to cultural phenomena that imbue a way of life in the creation of district identities. Through their physically tangible character and form, their legibility creates a localized notion of signifiers and specific institutionalized meanings by representing gradual cultural maturation. There are heterogeneously developed physical settings of culture in spatial distributions of architectural plans of cultural center projects directed to calculate the percentage of floor area. Observing how effectively culture operates through specific ideological prefiguration legitimized within architectural identities is essential to comprehend cultural coherency. These identities integrate all the spaces of cultural centers into facilities aligned with cultural activities, such as multi-purpose halls (e.g., exhibition halls, education halls, conference halls, multimedia installation halls), foyer areas, stages, art galleries, workshop areas, libraries, ateliers, and other socio-cultural spaces. Through Tafuri's ideological criticism of architecture, it

is important to mention that these spaces are structurally linked to the political struggles inherent in the cultural basis of capitalist development (Aureli, 2010). According to Baudrillard, such culturally specific spatial formations as "agglutination of culture as an automatic agglomeration of masses" is stated under the ambiguity which is a result of the production of space through a simulation of authenticity and hybridization of local cultures coming together in a production and consumption cycle (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 22). Such apprenticeship of spaces to the spectacle of cultural activities is seasonally influenced by the political agenda, or appropriated spatial and material hierarchies that shape urban life, and this is determined by the architectural program and capacity of the cultural centers. These activities include artistic events such as exhibitions, performances (music, theater, dance), and film screenings; educational activities like workshops, lectures, training sessions, and cultural classes; community engagement through gatherings, cultural exchange programs, and local markets; recreational activities such as interactive installations and rehearsals; knowledge sharing via library use, heritage projects, and research conferences; professional events like seminars and creative industry showcases; technological experiences including digital media creation; and celebrations such as cultural festivals, and gatherings during holidays. Baudrillard's criticism aligns with Tafuri's claims that cultural centers in Ankara exemplify how spaces commodify cultural identity by transforming it into a consumable product, thus conforming to the mechanisms of the creative economy. These centers often present a curated version of culture, emphasizing spectacle and entertainment to attract diverse audiences, making their architectural positioning not merely a neutral vessel, but an active participant in municipalities' commodification and the selective narrative promotion process.

Cultural centers trigger improvement in cultural education or address high-income citizens/intellectuals who can afford the fees for activities and can sometimes overestimate the local people of the districts and their actual need for cultural-communal education. This happens when municipalities face financial difficulties and are exposed to changing cultural center programs to increase visibility and turn the programs into cultural industry products. This is seen in Ankara, where different identities and indicators of culture display various characteristics and spatiality embedded in the production, presentation, and consumption in various spatial forms.

## Zülfü Livaneli Cultural Center-Çankaya District

Zülfü Livaneli Cultural Center (ZLCC) was built on 1,000 square meters between high-rise apartment blocks and public parks in the Yıldızevler district of Çankaya (Figure 3). The building is named after the master Turkish musician, author, and poet Zülfü Livaneli (1946-). In terms of cultural intermediaries, the center is essential in the shaping of cultural conventions as it provides social services, community development, and enlightenment in a socially democratic manner, which is in harmony with the mission statement of Çankaya Municipality (Özgen and Sarı, 2011).

In terms of cultural coherence in terms of activity, form, and meaning, all of which are shaped by the spatial configuration of a trapezoidal form, this structure is situated between two streets named after prominent foreign writers: Rabindranath Tagore, a leading figure in modern Indian thought and poetry, and José Martí, a Cuban nationalist revolutionary, poet, and politician. The center has three floors: the basement floor has multipurpose halls, music, literature, cinema, and dance ateliers; the ground floor has exhibition halls; while on the upper floor, there is an exhibition hall for 120 people and a foyer. The names of the spaces within the cultural center were inspired by Livaneli's books, such as the 'Mutluluk Exhibition Center,' 'Leyla'nın Evi Conference Hall', and the 'Serenade Hall' (Çankaya Belediyesi, n.d.). The ratio of cultural spatiality is 37%, according to the meter square of the cultural center, and consists of a multipurpose hall, exhibition hall, ateliers, and a foyer (Figure 4A, 4B and 4C). Some of the activities that occur in the building are small-



**Figure 3.** Bird's-eye view of ZLCC. Source: Drawn by the author on Google Earth (2024) satellite view.
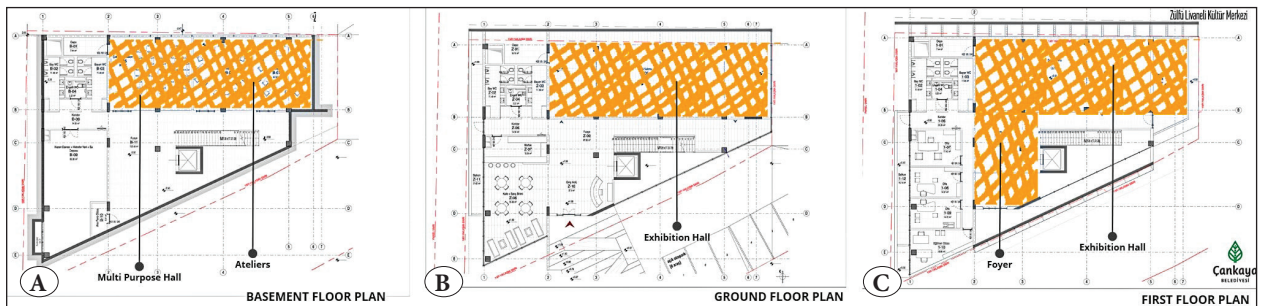


**Figure 4A, 4B and 4C.** ZLCC's cultural spatiality plans.
Source: Created by the author, floor plans were taken from the ACE Architecture Company Archive.

scale exhibitions, film ateliers, training courses, and the creation of culturally inclusive and activity-based spaces with a higher ratio of cultural spatiality when compared to other cultural centers in different districts of Ankara.

In the front outdoor space, the sculptures of Zülfü Livaneli and Nazım Hikmet symbolize the profound aesthetic and ideological connection between the two artists. This connection took the form of a unification of Nazım Hikmet's poetry, and Zülfü Livaneli's music reinterpreted through a different art form; Zülfü Livaneli's rendition of Nazım Hikmet's poems as folk songs transformed them into a voice for the people, centering on humanity

and advocating for universal human values (Figure 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 5F).

In terms of how the experiences of urbanites create meaning within a cultural space, the positive feedback received on activities, vocational programs, and educational courses suggests that the main function of the building is as a community center. However, the limited utilization of spaces and infrequent events have diminished the spirit and intensity associated with the specific name and form normally designated to the cultural center (Table 1).
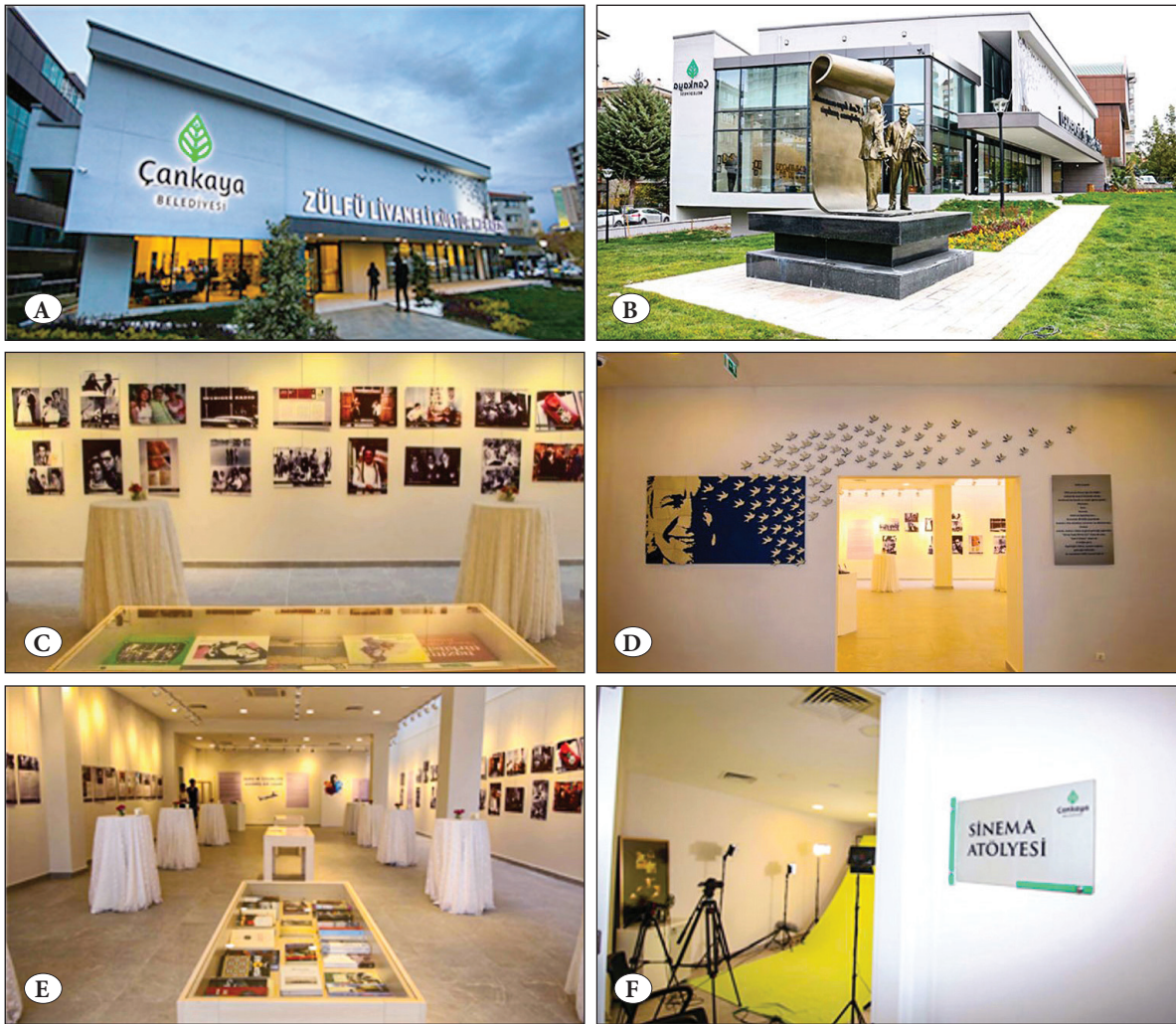


***Figure 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 5F.*** Indoor-outdoor relationship of ZLCC.
Source: Çankaya Municipality Archive.

**Table 1**. *Comprehensive Critical Summary of Reviews for ZLCC*

| Positive Reviews | Negative Reviews |
|---|---|
| Offers a variety of cultural and artistic activities, such as short film training, scriptwriting workshops, dance, music, and yoga courses. | The oversized display of Zülfü Livaneli's name is considered aesthetically unappealing by some visitors. |
| Features modern interior design and architecture, making it a refined and pleasant space. | The library is often empty and lacks a book-lending service, which is a missed opportunity. |
| Provides free courses and exhibitions. | The exhibition hall is small and is therefore only suitable for minor events. |
| Offers free and intellectually enriching activities for children and young people. | Events are organized infrequently, leaving visitors wanting more. |
| Friendly staff and easily accessible location. | The library's potential isn't fully utilized; book enthusiasts would benefit from more services. |
| A municipality-supported venue, ideal for daily use and open to the public. | Some believe that the venue should reach a wider audience and have more influence. |
| A valuable art center for Ankara, highly recommended for intellectuals and modern citizens. | |

Source: Google Reviews (covering the past 5 years).

### Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Cultural Center-Altındağ District

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Cultural Center (NFKCC) is situated on a 15,000 square meter area in the Gülpınar district of Altındağ and is surrounded by 3-4 floor residential and educational buildings. This area's population density is notably higher than that of the Çankaya region and is further enhanced by additional land uses such as commercial and sports facilities (Figure 6). NFKCC mainly functions as a public library, with theatre performances and sporting activities being held in the centers. Altındağ Municipality has changed the name of the building to Altındağ Belediyesi Yıldıztepe Library.
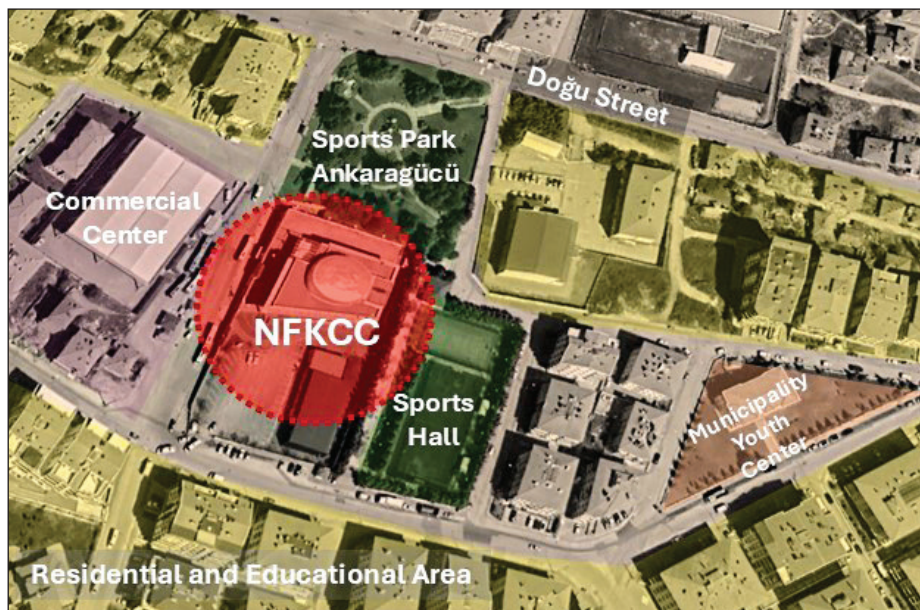


*Figure 6.* Bird's-eye view of NFKCC.
Source: Drawn by the author on Google Earth (2024) satellite view.

The new name demonstrates how political views have made the physical setting and functionality of the cultural space more introverted by placing the conference and performance rooms on the inner side. Culture shapes space organization, and the NFKCC's architecture can be viewed as a carrier of cultural meanings and interpretations. To make the center more attractive, the dome on top of the building, through a decisive shift driven by aesthetic and technological developments, is supported by underlying ideologies in a trapezoid form under a cantilever roof supported by ordered columns (Figure 7A and 7B) (Temple, 2012).

24% of the total floor area is dedicated to cultural activities. The conference hall is connected with external tools as an instrumental manifestation of culture sustaining conventionally. The municipality has converted the foyer and cafeteria into a library, without considering the space from a cultural perspective, thus reducing the amount of space available for cultural activities. However, the center cannot be considered as part of the culture's hegemony, and the centering of the conference hall can only be considered a showcase of the cultural-creative industry. This is due to the conference hall also being used as a theater hall, making it more potent than other spaces which do not include artistic, performative and workshop activities (Figure 8A, 8B and 8C).

According to the reviews, the fact that whose culture is being represented and the cultural alignment of the spaces is ambiguous does not create an appealing perspective to attract larger audiences. While the eclectic usage of daycare services and sports facilities is mentioned positively in some reviews, perceived conflicts with the notions and dynamics of this cultural center are also criticized. It is felt by some that these features not only reduce the meaning of the center to that of a traditional library, but also trivialize and degrade the center's cultural significance (Table 2).



**Figure 7A and 7B.** The form and ideologically ornamented front facade of the NFKCC.
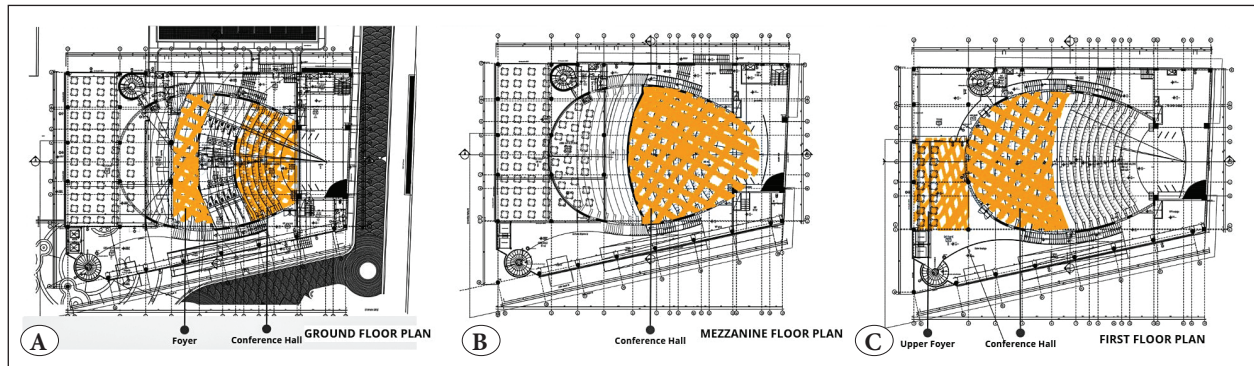Source: Author.



**Figure 8A, 8B and 8C.** NFKCC's cultural spatiality plans.
Source: Created by the author, floor plans were taken from the Architect Erdal Sorgucu Archive.

**Table 2.** *Comprehensive Critical Summary of Reviews for NFKCC.*

| Positive Reviews | Negative Reviews |
|---|---|
| The hall is allocated to amateur theater groups on weekends. Free theater services are especially notable. | Not everyone may find the library appealing; its cultural alignment is questioned by some. |
| The library is spacious and functional, suitable for studying or reading. | Events could be more frequent to attract larger audiences. |
| Neşet Ertaş's name being honored here is a wonderful gesture, and the cultural activities enrich the experience. | The parking area is insufficient, and traffic can be challenging. |
| Large, airy, and clean cultural center. The theater and conference hall are warm and well-maintained. | Questions about the center's cultural direction: 'Which culture does it represent? |
| Includes a theater, library, daycare services, and outdoor green spaces like parks and sports facilities. | |
| A social center befitting the capital, helpful for children's sports development. | |

Source: Google Reviews (covering the past 5 years).

### Nazım Hikmet Cultural Center-Yenimahalle District

The land chosen in 2011 for the cultural center was located in an industrial estate at the intersection of the existing residential area and cooperatives on the edge of the Demetevler Zone in the Yenimahalle district (Figure 9).

Nazım Hikmet Cultural Center (NHCC) is under the governance of Yenimahalle Municipality, and the name summarizes the relationality between power-ideology-space. The Nazım Hikmet Ran (1902-1963) cultural center houses a commemoration of the famous Turkish poet with his romantic communist and poetry recitations in different



*Figure 9.* Bird's-eye view of NHCC.
Source: Drawn by the author on Google Earth (2024) satellite view.

periods of several years (Özgen and Sarı, 2021). In Yenimahalle, like the Çankaya District, the municipality has cultural and social developments and services available that, according to current trends, can meet the cultural demands of urbanites. NHCC works from a social democratic perspective, in which cultural policy supports highend consumption by supporting the economic viability of the municipality through social events and performances.

The placement of the cultural center, positioned near a park commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Republic, is a solitary contrast with the existing urban fabric. Due to the limited size of the plot, an elliptical compact plan solution was preferred for the cultural program. The elevation dynamism aims to establish a strong visual relationship with the city and its citizens yet lacks cultural references on the exterior façade. However, a bold statement is made with a silhouette of Nazım Hikmet, which strengthens the inclusivity of the building and is visible from the highway connection to Başkent Boulevard., This design promotes dialogue by reflecting Nazım Hikmet's spirit of innovation and his dedication to the people, creating a sense of connection for passersby (Figure 10A and 10B).

With an area of approximately 33,000 square meters, the NHCC is more extensive than all of the other cultural centers in Ankara. However, it struggles to fulfill culture's broader and more complex role as an extended field. Different theater design approaches for multifunctional purposes or performative arts are fully realized in the theater/performance hall, and these are complemented by the exhibition space and foyer. Yenimahalle Municipality has named the 1,508-seat hall at the Nazım Hikmet Congress and Art Center after the renowned theater artist Genco Erkal, who brought Nazım Hikmet's works to the stage. Erkal conveyed themes of human rights, freedom, and justice to broad audiences in his plays, and so naming the hall after Genco Erkal symbolizes a deep commitment to the legacy and values of Nazım Hikmet. Yıldız Kenter Hall, named in honor of one of Turkey's greatest theatrical performers, Yıldız Kenter, embodies perfection, just like the unforgettable artist it commemorates.

Due to the building's large footprint the cultural spatiality ratio is relatively low, at about 28%, but cultural, social, and economic usability, as well as cultural-creative industry and performative potential, are significantly higher (Figure 11A, 11B and 11C). This is evident in the weekly performances by state and private theaters, which are driven by cultural policies implemented through the reforms of Yenimahalle Municipality. These reforms aim to foster a competitive theater environment during the evenings, catering to the high cultural intelligence of its local citizens. The citizens also utilize the center for social and communal-cultural events such as weddings and special programs, transforming the cultural center into a hub for cultural industry and commercial activities.

Following the activity and form dimensions, the intended meanings for the users are closely aligned with the cultural center, which provides a modern and spacious venue for hosting cultural events for public use. The name of the NHCC is well-suited for its purpose, as it accommodates vibrant activities on both weekdays and weekends, making it a truly modern cultural hub (Table 3).



**Figure 10A and 10B.** NHCC's front elevation and inner exhibition spaces.
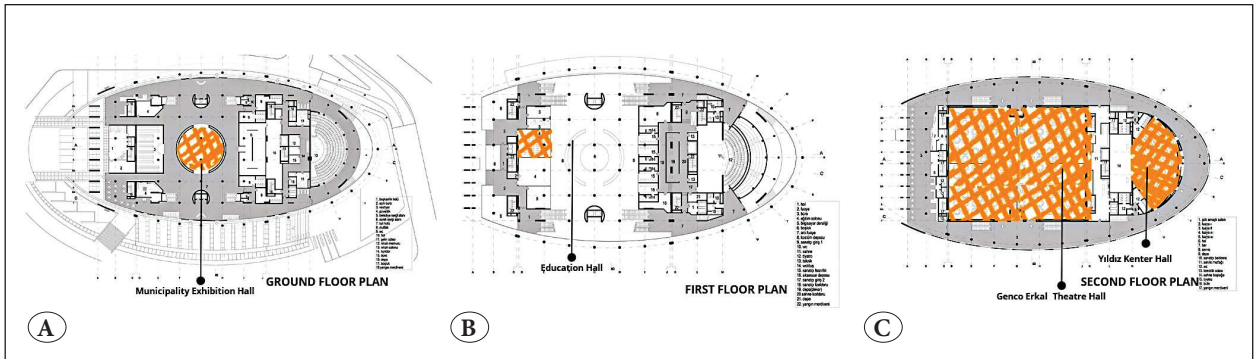Source: Yenimahalle Municipality Archive.

**Figure 11A, 11B and 11C.** NHCC's cultural spatiality plans.
Source: Created by the author; floor plans were taken from E Atelier Architecture Archive.

**Table 3.** *Comprehensive Critical Summary of Reviews for NHCC.*

| Positive Reviews | Negative Reviews |
|---|---|
| Nazım Hikmet Congress and Art Center in Ankara Yenimahalle is a modern, spacious venue with facilities like a wedding hall, theater, terrace café, and ample parking. | Although the name is fitting, it lacks funding and fails to attract high-quality congresses. |
| The center is suitable for concerts, seminars, exhibitions, and various cultural events, offering an elegant and functional experience. The Genco Erkal Hall and other sections are well-designed for diverse events, making it highly versatile. | During crowded events, having only two doors can cause delays during exits. |
| The modern architecture, clean and peaceful atmosphere, and accessibility via public transportation make it a standout cultural hub. | Dressing rooms in backstage areas are too small for large groups like choirs. |
| Yenimahalle Municipality's effort has created an elegant, functional, and much-needed cultural center for artistic growth and public use. | |
| This center adds vibrancy to Ankara and rivals cultural hubs in other cities, offering an ideal venue for enjoying concerts, year-end performances, and exhibitions. | |

Source: Google Reviews (covering the past 5 years).

## Dede Korkut Ata Cultural Center- Etimesgut District

Dede Korkut Ata Cultural Center (DKACC) is located on the periphery of the Ankara highway, at the intersection with Ahi Mesut Boulevard, and positioned between the residential areas of the Etimesgut district in an 8,500 square meter area (Figure 12). The emergent representative themes and figures around the center, reflected in the naming of roads such as Ahi Mesut—an essential figure in the philosophy of the Ahi order and the inspiration behind the district's name—and Alparslan Türkeş, a significant figure in Turkish politics, align with the Etimesgut Municipality's ideological affiliations. After its construction, the cultural center's mission is closely tied to the ancient epics of the Oghuz Turks, reflecting the traditions and customs of nomadic steppe life and tribal organization in Turkish history. The visual symbols and artworks featured in its interior and exterior, along with the nationalist naming of its spatial elements, reinforce emerging representative themes of the district by strengthening political representations. Thus, the cultural theme and flow aim to preserve Turkish culture, evoking the legacy of Turkish elders through the building's performance and cultural-serving artworks.
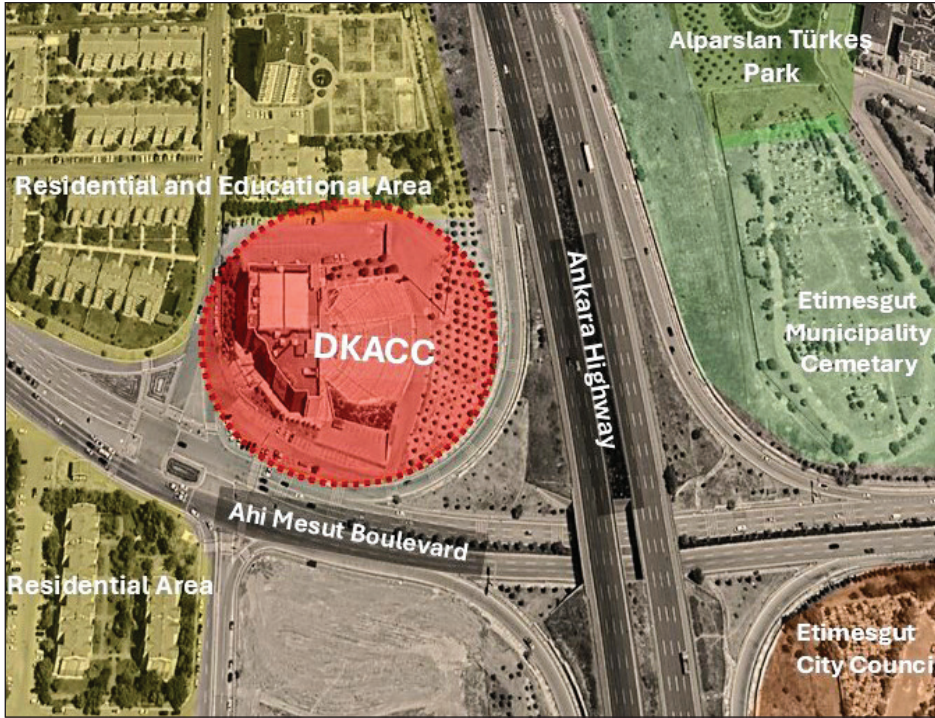
*Figure 12.* Bird's-eye view of DKACC.
Source: Drawn by the author on Google Earth (2024) satellite view.

Since the architectural design in its determined form already incorporates a cultural program with an open stage and multiple halls where functions remain undefined, citizens in Etimesgut have limited opportunities to organize spatial-cultural activities independently. Instead, the municipality utilizes the space for its own political programs and meetings, which are often disguised as examples of cultural integration. The open stage of the cultural center, located at the rear, is a neglected and overlooked space with no clear signage or direction leading from the main entrance, and so most people are unaware of its very existence (Figure 13A and 13B).

The cultural spatiality ratio in DKACC is 38%, but this high ratio is due to the covered area of the open stages, which remain primarily unused, especially during winter. The conference halls are often utilized for wedding ceremonies, catering events, or gatherings that bring together citizens from various districts (Figure 14A, 14B, 14C and 14D).
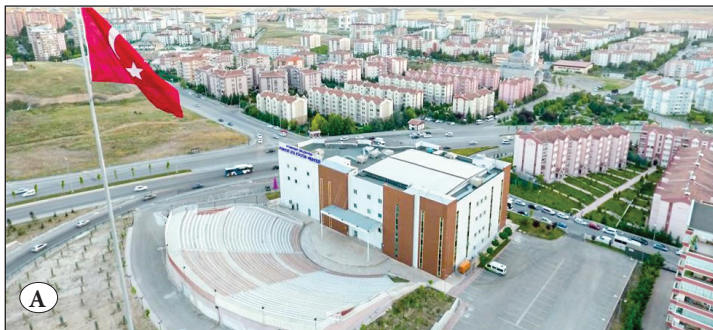


*Figure 13A and 13B.* DKACC site overview and front elevation during a political party meeting.
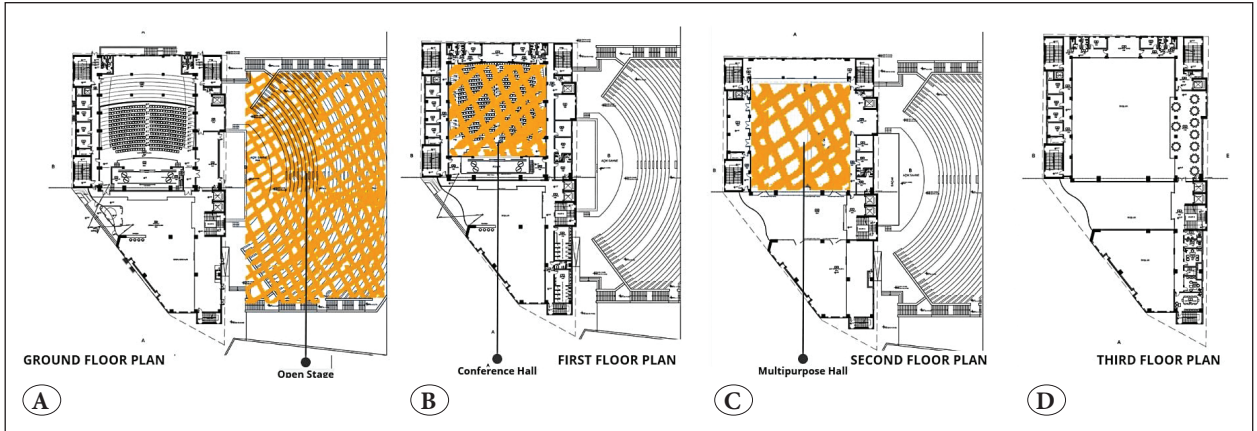Source: Korkut Ata Kongre, n.d.

**Figure 14A, 14B, 14C and 14D.** DKACC's cultural spatiality plans.
Source: Created by the author, floor plans were taken from Etimesgut Municipality Public Works' Archive.

When examining its purpose, the cultural center feels more like a functional celebration area and resembles a hotel lobby. It is, therefore, less suited to functioning as a genuine cultural space. This is reflected in its spacious halls and services, which lack meaningful cultural content and fail to foster cultural interaction, offering only social and entertainment-based engagement. The absence of connections to authentic cultural indicators creates a disconnect with the citizens, leaving the space unable to effectively represent or engage with the cultural identity of Etimesgut (Table 4).

## Neşet Ertaş Cultural Center-Keçiören District

In the middle of residential and health facilities, Neşet Ertaş Cultural Center (NECC) is located in Keçiören and covers an area of 7,600 square meters (Keçiören Belediyesi, n.d.). Positioned as a cultural landmark, the building is elliptical in shape, situated on a high hill, and is complemented by a waterfall below as part of the landscape design (Figure 15). The center serves as a performance hall and hosts symposiums, panels, concerts, folk dance performances, theater productions, and exhibitions for various cultural organizations.

**Table 4.** *Comprehensive Critical Summary of Reviews for DKACC.*

| Positive Reviews | Negative Reviews |
|---|---|
| The cultural center is a versatile venue with spaces for weddings, conferences, seminars, concerts, and exhibitions. It is well-designed, spacious, and offers ample parking with an easily accessible location near the highway. | The venue can feel cold during some events, as noted during a wedding organization. |
| Beautiful and spacious interiors, including a grand entrance, clean halls, and a functional amphitheater outside. | Traffic around the venue can be heavy, making access slightly challenging during peak times. |
| Child-friendly events like the children's festival and development seminars are enjoyable and impactful. | Some visitors noted a lack of refreshments like tea or water provided to attendees during events. |
| The garden amphitheater and versatile stage areas are perfect for summer events and artistic performances. | The lobby and foyers feel more like a hotel, which some visitors found less appropriate for a cultural venue. |
| A truly remarkable venue with attentive staff and a warm ambiance, reflecting the effort and dedication of the municipality. | |

Source: Google Reviews (covering the past 5 years).

The building and its surrounding urban design elements fail to embody the modest approach and artistic vision associated with Neşet Ertaş, who carried the historical and cultural significance of the title 'Folk Ashik'. Instead, its contemporary and technologically driven form, reminiscent of a metal shed, aligns more with the principles of modern architecture, thus diverging from the traditional aesthetic that characterizes Ertaş's legacy (Figure 16A and 16B).

NECC is primarily active during the evenings, with its landscape design serving as a public recreation area for residents. The cultural spatiality ratio is 19%. This indicates that, aside from spaces which foster cultural interaction such as the theater, performance hall, and foyer, other areas lack explicit cultural functionality. In relation to cultural coherency, such a deficiency can shift the building's primary purpose away from its intended cultural focus (Figure 17A, 17B, 17C and 17D).
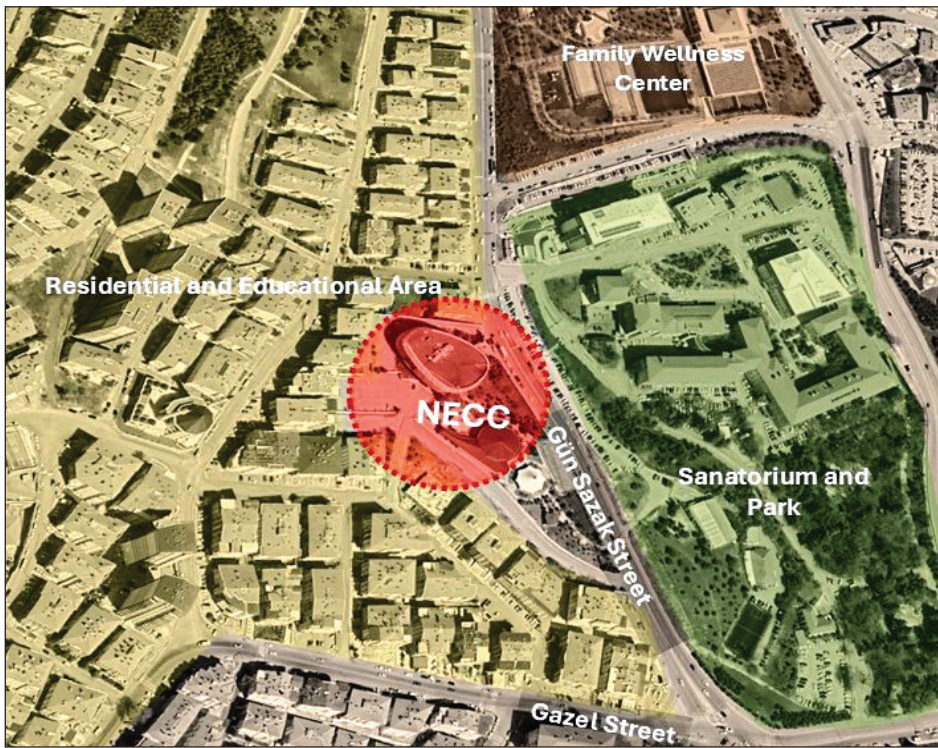


*Figure 15.* Bird's-eye view of NECC. Source: Drawn by the author on Google Earth (2024) satellite view.



*Figure 16A and 16B.* NECC front facade and surrounding landscape elements.
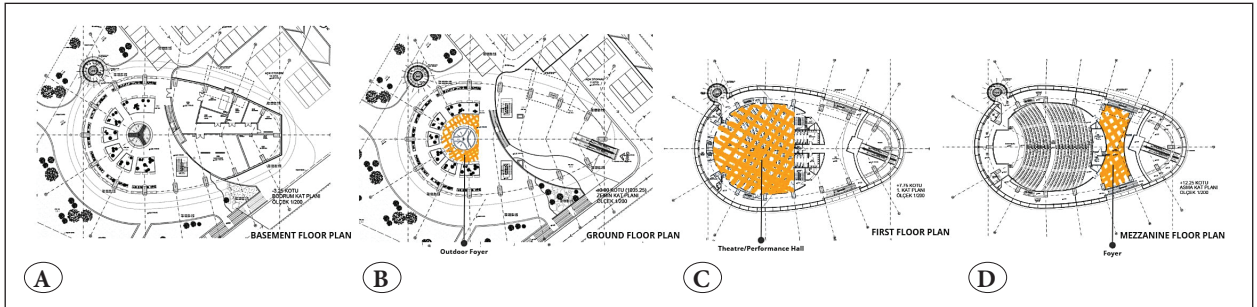Source: Neşet Ertaş Sanat ve Gösteri Merkezi, n.d.

**Figure 17A, 17B, 17C and 17D.** NECC's cultural spatiality plans.
Source: Created by the author, floor plans were taken from the Korucuoğlu Architecture Archive.

Due to its topographical location, the building has become a monumental landmark due to its visual prominence being emphasized over accessibility. Its placement may enhance Ankara's scenic views, but it limits the spaces' functionality to the theater/performance hall and foyer. These areas, however, hold less significance compared to its spaceship-like design, which has been criticized as being both useless and monstrous. Meanwhile, the adjacent park and waterfall are perceived as more practical and beneficial elements than the cultural service of the building (Table 5).

**Table 5.** *Comprehensive Critical Summary of Reviews for NECC.*

| Positive Reviews | Negative Reviews |
|---|---|
| A beautiful cultural and congress center with unique architecture, reflecting the memory of Neşet Ertaş and hosting various events like seminars and concerts. | The venue feels far from the city center, making it less accessible for some attendees. |
| The center has a great ambiance, with a beautiful design resembling a spaceship, a serene park, and Ankara views. | The entrance involves long stairs, which can be difficult for elderly or physically challenged visitors. |
| Neşet Ertaş's name being honored here is a wonderful gesture, and the cultural activities enrich the experience. | The parking area is insufficient, and traffic can be challenging. |
| Suitable for seminars, shows, and meetings with a well-maintained and spacious auditorium. | Some visitors questioned its purpose, with comments like 'Why was this even built?' |
| Clean and well-maintained, with amenities like a waterfall and functional event spaces. | Some described the building as a 'useless monstrosity', feeling it fails to serve practical purposes. |
| The center is located in a serene environment, offering a peaceful atmosphere for various events. | More effort could be put into promoting events on platforms, like social media, to increase attendance. |

Source: Google Reviews (covering the past 5 years).

## Evliya Çelebi Cultural Center-Sincan District

The Evliya Çelebi Cultural Center (ECCC) is named after the 17th-century Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi, who is renowned for documenting his travels across the Ottoman Empire in his famous travelogue, the *Seyahatname*. The ECCC is integrated into a 3-4 floor residential complex, blending cultural and residential functions in a 3,700 square meter area (Figure 18).

The building form of the ECCC adopts a traditional approach, incorporating Seljuk and Ottoman architectural elements such as the *eyvan* (a vaulted, semi-open space) and the overhanging eave roof, reflecting Anatolian traditions and creating a stark contrast to contemporary 21st-century design practices. The *eyvan* symbolizes hospitality and is a transitional space connecting indoor and outdoor areas. At the same time, the overhanging eave roof protects the building from the weather and enhanc-

*Figure 18.* Bird's-eye view of ECCC.
Source: Drawn by the author on Google Earth (2024) satellite view.

es its aesthetic harmony. This architectural choice aligns with the conservative democrat ideology of the local government that administers the Sincan Municipality (Figure 19A and 19B).

Cultural spatiality is approximately 5%, with only cultural interaction occurring at the building's entrance since the function has been changed. The designated cultural spaces have been entirely converted into study areas. The low cultural spatiality ratios are unsurprising due to the lack of sociocultural interactions, such as events or exhi-

bitions. The Sincan Municipality has renamed the building the *Evliya Çelebi Millet Kıraathanesi*, also called the Sincan Public Library, and added a coffee house. Rooted in Ottoman tradition, this concept functions as a reading room, an activity space near bookshelves in a repetition of floor plans, and a spacious coffeehouse *(kıraathane)* (Figure 20A, 20B and 20C).

The building's meaning has become more defined today with the name change; however, the district has lost its sense of place attachment to the cultural embodiment it
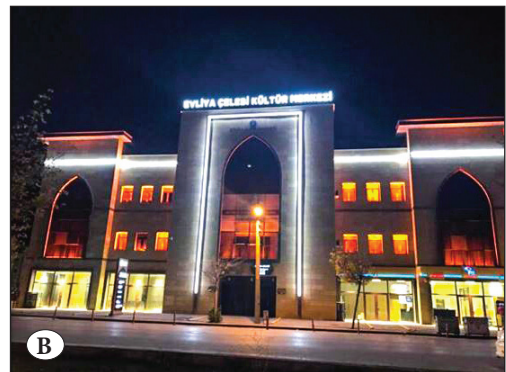


*Figure 19A and 19B. Evliya Çelebi Millet Kıraathanesi* and formerly known as Evliya Çelebi Cultural Center.
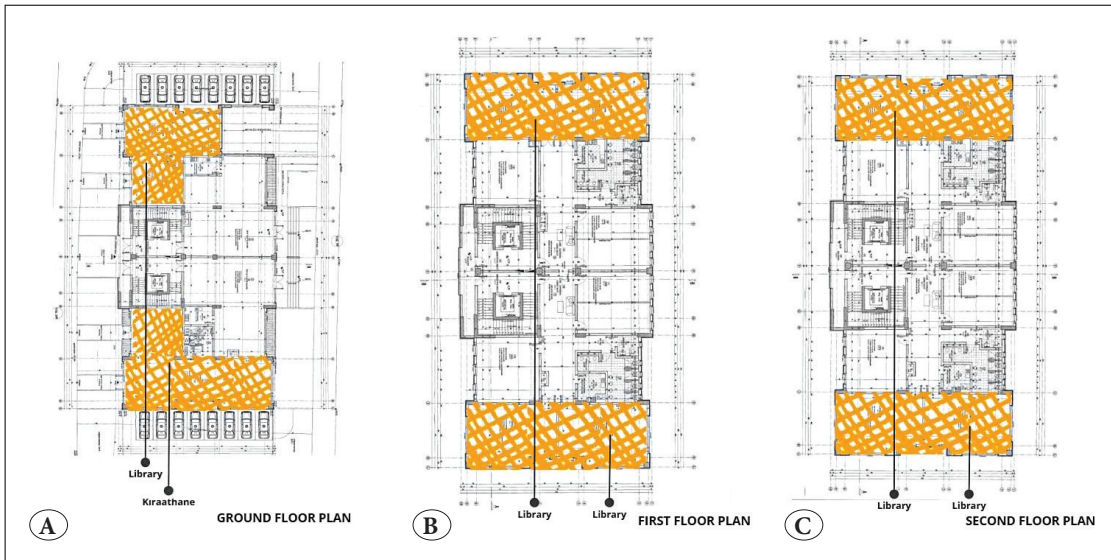Source: Sincan Municipality Archive.

***Figure 20A, 20B and 20C.*** ECCC's cultural spatiality plans.
Source: Created by the author, floor plans were taken from the Sincan Municipality Public Works Archive.

once represented. Instead, it has transitioned into a library, which is a blessing space for the students of the district (Table 6). This means that the center does not cater to all in terms of socio-cultural events and gatherings that foster cultural production and consumption, which are essential for citizenship development and the promotion of local cultural distinctiveness. The rectangular, uniform rooms fail to attract interest or inspire engagement, instead reflecting a manipulative design that does little to serve the broader cultural needs of the community.

Ankara's six cultural centers reflect diverse activities, forms, and meanings shaped by local ideologies and the operational priorities of decisive authorities shaping their futures. The complexity of cultural spaces increases as ideological indicators influence their design and function, leading each administration to impose solutions on citizens, and these often reflect their own priorities rather than community-driven needs. Overall, the comparative overview of the study, including ZLCC, NFKCC, NHCC, DKACC, NECC, and ECCC, reflecting the proliferation and consumption of cultural centers, is summarized in Table 7.

**Table 6.** *Comprehensive Critical Summary of Reviews for ECCC.*

| Positive Reviews | Negative Reviews |
|---|---|
| The library provides an ideal environment for studying, with a dedicated reading area resembling a *kıraathane*. | It is unclear if books can be borrowed to read at home, raising questions about the library's accessibility. |
| An excellent place for studying, offering a modern and quiet atmosphere. | While the library is modern, its cultural alignment and purpose are subject to debate. |
| A blessing for students, as the library offers a great space for focused learning. | |
| The availability of desired books to read freely is highly appreciated. | |

Source: Google Reviews (covering the past 5 years).

**Table 7.** *Comparative overview of the cultural centers as a summary*

| Name | District | Activity | Form | Meaning | Cultural Spatiality |
|------|----------|----------|------|---------|---------------------|
| **ZLCC** | Çankaya | Exhibitions, film ateliers, cultural courses | Trapezoidal design with multi-purpose halls, ateliers, and foyers integrates community accessibility | Represents socio-democratic ideals and community development | 37% |
| **NFKCC** | Altındağ | Library services, occasional theater performances | Trapezoidal form with a dome; introverted layout focused on conference halls and libraries | Reflects political ideologies; cultural emphasis diluted post-library transformation | 24% |
| **NHCC** | Yenimahalle | Theater, performances, exhibitions, ceremonies | Elliptical compact plan with multifunctional theater halls and foyers; bold visual statement | Honors Nazım Hikmet's legacy while fostering cultural consumption and creative industries | 28% |
| **DKACC** | Etimesgut | Cultural festivals, political events, ceremonies | Monumental design with open stages and multifunctional halls | Celebrates Turkish nomadic traditions and socio-cultural heritage | 38% |
| **NECC** | Keçiören | Concerts, folk dances, theater | Elliptical metal shed design with a focus on performance spaces | Aims to honor Neşet Ertaş, but criticized for misaligned design | 19% |
| **ECCC** | Sincan | Reading sessions, small cultural events | Rectangular design with Ottoman influences; converted into a study-oriented library | Transformed into a self-educational space, losing cultural event focus | 5% |

## Conclusion

Ankara, a culturally diverse city in the 21st century, serves as a critical platform where the interaction between space and culture is redefined through its cultural centers. These centers act as pivotal arenas for cultural production and consumption, reflecting the socio-economic and ideological layers of the city. However, the analysis reveals significant disparities in their ability to foster cultural cohesion and interaction. Cultural centers across different districts demonstrate notable variations in functionality, design, and alignment with cultural coherence and community expectations.

For instance, while Zülfü Livaneli and Nazım Hikmet Cultural Centers effectively integrate community-driven activities and resonate with local cultural needs, offering vibrant platforms for cultural exchange, even these centers face limitations, with occasional underutilization of spac-es and events that do not consistently fulfill the broader cultural aspirations of the community. On the other hand, spaces like the Evliya Çelebi Cultural Center have truly shifted away from their intended cultural missions, becoming more utilitarian and focused on functional uses, such as study areas, thus losing their cultural vibrancy.

Similarly, the Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Cultural Center illustrates a dilution of its cultural essence, transforming critical spaces into a library and leaving limited room for diverse cultural activities. The Dede Korkut Ata Cultural Center struggles with underutilized facilities like its open stages, primarily serving as a venue for ceremonial or political events, thereby failing to foster genuine cultural interaction. The Neşet Ertaş Cultural Center, despite its striking design and prominent location, prioritizes visual prominence over functional cultural spaces, and offers limited activities beyond its theater and performance hall.

These findings underscore the broader challenge of balancing the coexistence of culture and space—a conflicting practice in which culture risks being dissolved into architecture. As asserted by Tafuri (1974), cultural centers may devolve into a deconstructed system of provisional signs with ideological residues, reducing culture to a mass medium subordinated within an urban framework.

The research highlights the tension between culture as a consumable commodity and a medium for genuine cultural exchange and identity formation. The spatial and functional adaptations of Ankara's cultural centers reflect a continuous negotiation between these roles, often shaped more by ideological priorities than by the cultural needs of the residents.

To address these challenges, a more inclusive and community-focused approach is necessary in the planning and programming of cultural centers. Prioritizing adaptability, cultural coherence, and genuine engagement can fulfill the potential of these spaces to represent and promote Ankara's rich cultural diversity. Adopting such a strategy would ensure that cultural centers function as authentic platforms for interaction and understanding, and ultimately sustain their role as vital contributors to the city's dynamic cultural identity.

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