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Public libraries in Turkey



Turkey has a long tradition of libraries. Public libraries are administered by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate of Libraries and Publishers in Turkey, where the population is around 71 million with 81 provinces in seven large geographic regions. The main problem of the public libraries is that they also serve as school libraries, because of the insufficient number of school libraries in most places.

Die Öffentlichen Bibliotheken in der Türkei

Die Türkei hat eine lange Bibliothekstradition. Die Öffentlichen Bibliotheken werden vom Ministerium für Kultur und Tourismus, Generaldirektion für Bibliotheken und Verlage verwaltet. Die Bevölkerung beträgt ungefähr 71 Millionen, die sich auf 81 Provinzen in sieben großen geographischen Regionen verteilen. Das Hauptproblem der Öffentlichen Bibliotheken ist die Tatsache, dass sie auch als Schulbibliotheken dienen sollen, weil es in den meisten Orten zu wenig Schulbibliotheken gibt.

Les bibliothèques publiques en Turquie

La Turquie regarde sur une longue tradition de bibliothèques. Les bibliothèques publiques sont administrées par le Ministère de la Culture et du Tourisme, Direction générale des bibliothèques et des éditeurs en Turquie où la population s'élève à 71 millions réparties en 81 provinces en sept grandes régions géographiques. Le problème principal des bibliothèques publiques se trouve dans le fait qu'elles doivent servir pareillement de bibliothèques d'école qui, elles, manquent dans la plupart des localités.

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1. The history of public libraries in Turkey

Turkey has a library tradition of more than nine centuries, beginning during the Anatolia Seljuk period (1072-1299) and continuing through the Ottoman Empire, 1299-1922 (Erünsal 1988; Baysal 1992). During these periods,

libraries were set up with private foundations rather than by government and were associated with the Mosque, Dervish Lodge, Mausoleum, Moslem theological school and other foundations.

Printing was established in 1728 in Turkey, approximately 250 years after the remainder of Europe. This delay

hindered the development of public libraries. In 1869 libraries were connected to the Ministry of Education and obtained civil service identity for the first time (Soysal 1987). In 1882 the public library service was established by the government. Between 1912 and 1918, many public libraries were established under the title of 'national library' (Soysal 1976).

With the founding of the Republic, there was a realization of the social and cultural role of public libraries. One of the most important reforms at this time was the change from the Arabic alphabet to Latin. The government started to promote literacy campaigns and public education programmes in order to encourage the use of the new alphabet and to foster the adoption of a more westernized culture. Essentially, public libraries became one of the principal means of effecting this cultural transformation during the period 1923-1950 and from 1960, they were included in the five-year development plans in Turkey. Public libraries were sometimes at the forefront of educational and cultural issues. However, the military activities in 1970 and 1980 damaged social and cultural development and this was reflected in public libraries. Today, it is difficult to define the functions and cultural role of the public library since there is no public law nor a national cultural strategy (Yılmaz 1998).

2. Structure and organization of public libraries in Turkey

Since 1960, all public libraries are administered by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate of Libraries and Publishes in Turkey, where the population is around 71 million with 81 provinces in seven large geographic regions. The General Directorate of Libraries is the largest department within the Ministry in terms of its budget and personnel. The children libraries, which are operated under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, are mainly established in the public libraries. Some children libraries have their own building, although there has been a recent trend towards having children libraries within the public libraries. There are also a few municipal libraries governed and financed by the local authorities. There are several articles in the regulations of the municipalities regarding the establishment of public libraries.



III. 1: Adults hall in Izmir Atatürk Public Library



III. 2: Mobile library of Izmir Atatürk Public Library

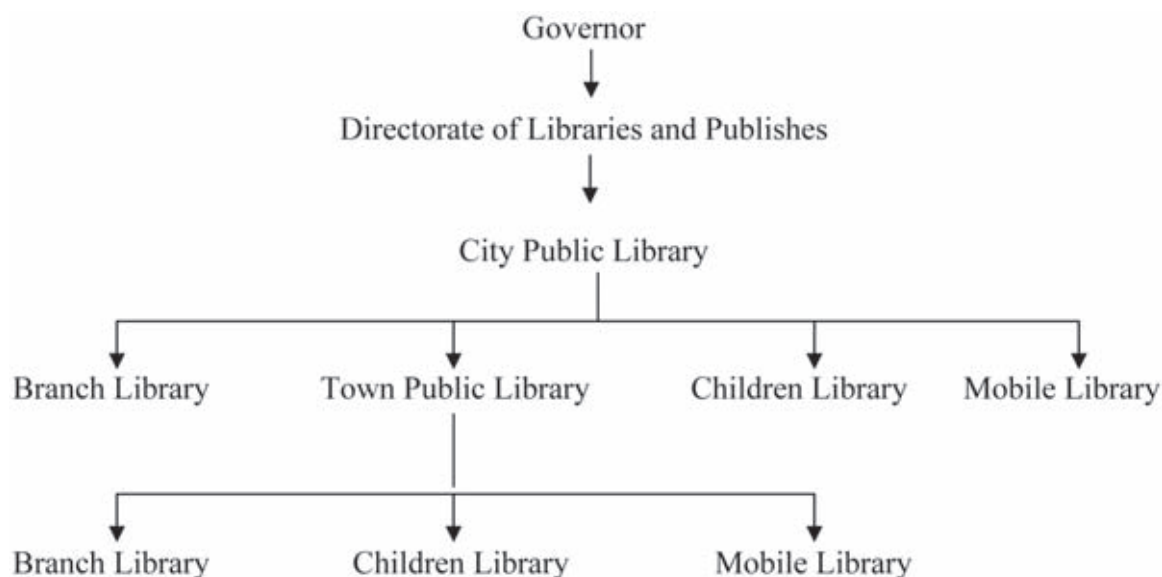
Public libraries are largely financed by the central government. However, the municipal administration provides some financial aid to the public libraries. Most of the local authorities support the Ministry of Culture and Tourism by providing the library buildings. The organizational structure of the libraries in the cities is as follows:

The public libraries give some services at prisons, care centers, child care institutions, camps, etc. The mobile libraries reach the rural and remote areas where public libraries do not exist (<http://www.pulmanweb.org/countries/Turkey.htm>).

However, the present government is trying to change the Turkish public administration. In the frame of these efforts accelerated by the integration period to European Community, Government is issuing the new laws in order to make the essential change. Main aim of these laws is to transfer the central public administration to the local administration system. This change will affect the present public library system in Turkey. If the law is passed in the Turkish Parliament, Turkish public libraries will give services under the responsibility of local authorities in the near future. It means that related change is the biggest radical transformation in public library system in Turkey.

3. Policies and strategic activities

In Turkey, there is no law governing the public libraries. But there are some regulations, most of which were revised in the 1980s, related to the services of public libraries, such as, „Public Libraries Task and Working Regulation” (*Official Journal*, 21.9.1981, 17465), „Public and Children Libraries Regulation” (*Official Journal* 19.8.1982, 17789), „Ministry of Culture and Tourism Regulation of Selection of Publications” (*Official Journal*, 18.06.2005, 25849), „Regulation of Educational and Cultural Activities in Libraries” (*Official Journal*, 21.9.1981, 17465), „Regulation of Inter Library Lending Printed Books” (*Official Journal*, 21.9.1981, 17465), and „Regulation of Celebrating the National Library Week” (*Official Journal*, 6.3.1982, 17625). As mentioned earlier, the public libraries are included in the five-year development plans under the headings of „culture” or „education”. In these development plans, general attitudes and principles regarding the public libraries



are mentioned. But there are serious problems in converting these principles into reality.

The main problem of the public libraries is that they also serve as school libraries, because of the insufficient number of school libraries in most places. Today only 10 % of schools have their own libraries. This affects the services, policies and facilities of the public libraries.

Collections of public libraries are developed by the General Directorate of Libraries and Publishes through central purchasing, according to the „Regulation of Selection of Publications”. The Directorate also pays attention to the recommendations made by the public libraries while selecting the materials. Some public libraries have their own public funds/associations supported by the local peo-

ple. These funds help them to develop their collections (<<http://www.pulmanweb.org/countries/Turkey.htm>>).

4. Statistics on public libraries in Turkey

There is a table (Table 1) which includes the data of the last 17 years in Turkey below:

As seen in Table 1, there is one public library for each about 50 000 people in Turkey. It is very far from international statistics. The number of registered (member) users seems very low. Also, public libraries in Turkey have not enough collection. 34,6 % of the total collection is loaned by the user. Each staff of public libraries has to

Table 1: Statistics on Turkish public libraries (<<http://kygm.kulturturizm.gov.tr>>)

Year	No. of Libraries	No. of Books	No. of Users	No. of Members	No. of Loaned Books	No. of Staff	No. of Mobile Libraries
1990	891	7 880 681	18 222 639	817 110	2 824 398	4096	45
1991	938	8 930 287	18 730 918	850 888	2 981 873	4112	51
1992	1 046	9 419 007	20 337 365	878 037	3 236 060	4107	59
1993	1 117	9 817 668	22 752 970	962 647	3 499 132	4107	66
1994	1 184	10 276 101	23 259 597	1 051 664	4 111 276	4110	77
1995	1 214	10 632 532	23 261 642	1 069 116	4 458 769	3858	73
1996	1 260	10 899 127	22 523 449	1 004 681	4 507 508	3285	72
1997	1 310	11 296 391	23 121 725	970 316	4 707 687	3162	70
1998	1 343	11 598 444	20 515 171	498 180	4 130 219	3212	70
1999	1 373	11 930 929	20 732 712	395 723	4 117 786	3067	67
2000	1 403	12 181 330	19 903 256	386 790	3 926 314	2923	68
2001	1 414	12 399 913	20 987 978	400 482	4 185 569	2878	67
2002	1 436	13 433 310	22 963 578	424 493	4 474 438	2842	67
2003	1 435	12 731 943	22 542 631	426 695	4 337 267	2715	65
2004	1 432	12 984 801	20 871 850	427 614	4 348 267	2529	62
2005	1 286	12 948 460	20 706 526	426 351	4 385 926	2426	62
2006	1 179	12 958 376	21 138 821	485 216	4 493 029	2 628	60

serve to app. 27 000 persons in Turkey. The number of mobile libraries is not enough for an effective public library service.

5. Information and communication technology in public libraries of Turkey

Public libraries use Anglo American Cataloguing Rules 2 (AACR2) and the 20th edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification system in general. Cataloguing and classification processes are done locally by each public library. Although efforts are being made to develop information technologies in public libraries, this is the most problematic area and one of primary concern. However, the „Section of Information Process“ within the General Directorate, is working on the transformation of the public libraries into automated libraries. Up to now, automation has been introduced in many libraries. These public libraries use a software program called „Milas 4.0“. It was developed and freely distributed by the General Directorate of Libraries and Publishers. But all services are not yet automated in these libraries. All catalog records are tried to be put in MARC format.

The General Directorate of Libraries and Publishers aims also to create a union catalog of all publications held at public libraries. Once the project is finalized, all public libraries will be able to access all of their records as well as the Directorate's records. With their own efforts, public libraries try to keep their Internet connections up and to create web pages.

The main problems in this area are:

- *Lack of strategy*: There is no a long term strategy on automation in public libraries.
- *Lack of money*: Because of insufficient budget allocations, most libraries cannot pay for their Internet connection fees.
- *Lack of staff*: There are not enough staff who have efficient skills to run an automated library <<http://www.pulmanweb.org/countries/Turkey.htm>>).

6. Conclusion

Turkey has a centralized public administration. So, all public libraries serve under this structure, as part of this centralized organization. It is well known that all public libraries should be under local authorities. But the local authorities in Turkey generally are the political institutions, and they do not see the libraries as their supporter in the election arena. So, they do not put any value on having the libraries as local organizations.

Turkey has officially started to the negotiation to join the European Union with the decision of heads of states and prime ministers of EU countries on October 3, 2005. This means that a new stage has started for Turkey in the pro-

cess of joining the EU. From now on, Turkish libraries will be evaluated under the subject heading of „Education and Culture“. It appears that public libraries in Turkey and EU countries are quite different. The difference between Turkey and EU increases especially with respect to librarians and public library use.

Some public administration laws which were issued by Turkish Parliament in 2004 and transfer the public library services from the central government to the local governments include some fundamental principles which can be used as a base for the reorganization process. However, in order to achieve the transformation of public library system successfully, the laws should be supported with the new legal regulations. Furthermore, there are some precautions which should be taken before the transformation process. Transformation of public library services without a well prepared infrastructure will result in serious problems.

There are four librarianship departments at the university level in Turkey, and the average number of graduates is 150-200 per year. So, there should not be a problem in finding qualified people to recruit to public libraries.

Turkey is the cradle of information and civilization from the antique period. It has a very dynamic and educated young population. Therefore, public libraries must become important and functional institutions by rapid reforms.

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