

Public Libraries in Turkey

Tülin Sağlamtuğ*

There are 1148 public libraries (PL) and 77 bookmobiles in Turkey (*T.C. Kültür*, 1994: 81-83). PLs have a children's department. There are also separate children's libraries. As table 1 shows, PLs are not evenly spread out throughout the Country:¹

Table 1. Distribution of Turkish Public Libraries by Region

Name of the Region	Number of PLs	%
1. Central Anatolia	328	28
2. East Anatolia	106	9
3. Southeast Anatolia	54	4.5
4. Aegean	203	17
5. Black Sea	194	16
6. Mediterranean	150	13
7. Marmara	149	12.5
Total	1184	100

In every province there is a Province PL and at least one bookmobile. There are still no PLs in 250 rural township. As one can see from table 1, the Central Anatolian Region is the richest and the Southeast Anatolian Region is the poorest region in Turkey concerning PLs.

Although since 1960 there have been serious attempts to develop the PL system, it cannot be said that result is satisfactory (*T.C. M.E.B.*, 1961: 6). Unfortunately PLs are still looked upon in Turkey as institutions where school-children prepare their homework. It is very seldom that adults use the PLs. Young adults also use the PLs very rarely after finishing the school. The reading habit is not well-developed among the Turkish people (Yılmaz, 1993: 46).

The new Unesco Public Library Manifesto 1994 defines the PL as "the local gateway to knowledge, (which) provides a basic condition for life-long learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups" (Unesco, 1995: 279). Also the Manifesto "proclaims Unesco's belief in the PL as a living force for education, culture, and information, and an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women" (Unesco, 1995: 279) Also, *IFLA Guidelines for Public Libraries* states the fact that, "Public Libraries should be equally available to all members of the community, regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, language status or educational attainment" (IFLA, 1986: 13). PLs in Turkey follow the Principle of Library Bill of Rights (Sağlamtuğ, 1991: 94).

* Professor Tülin Sağlamtuğ is with the Department of Library Science, Hacettepe University, 06532 Beytepe, Ankara.

¹ Information gathered from the General Directorate of Libraries, June 1995.

The amount of the total collection is 10.294.023 volumes and the total number of users is 23.259.597 (*T.C. Kültür*, 1994: 91). The population of Turkey is 56.473.035 and the ratio of literates is: %77.29 (*T.C. D.J.E. Kültür*, 1992: 11; *D.J.E.*, 1990: 1; *D.J.E. Genel*, 1989: 1). Neither the collection nor the number of users are sufficient to provide a PL service of good quality.

PLs are administered centrally by the General Directorate of Libraries of the Ministry of Culture. It has its advantages and disadvantages. Especially the central selection (*Kültür Bakanlığı*, 1995) of library materials for the whole country is a fatal mistake, as it can never meet the user demand, which is essential in librarianship.

There have been attempts to build up "Regional Librarianship" (*T.C. M.E.B.*, 1961: 22-26) to provide for a better PL service but they failed.

Since 1992 there have been reformal achievements undertaken. Some of the concrete examples of development in the field of PLs are: Some PLs in different regions of Turkey (Ankara, Antalya, Mersin, Kırklareli, Burdur, Şanlıurfa, Edirne, Muğla) were chosen for a pilot project in order to create public libraries in the western style. Those libraries were designed after the pattern of modern PLs: new departments for pre-school children, young adults, local history were added. Library materials (toys, chessboards, picture books, books, periodicals, newspapers, AV material, local artists' works, local history collection, etc.) were placed on open shelves. Bright colours were used for the library furniture instead of usual dull colours, carpets and curtains completed the atmosphere. Books were bound in transparent folios which proved to be more attractive than the dark coloured volumes. Those libraries all had multi-purpose halls for cultural activities (concerts, discussions on social problems, lectures, theatre performances, etc.) to show people that they can use the PLs also for leisure-time, to practise hobbies besides educating themselves. The purpose was to make them feel at home!

A great emphasis was placed on public relations to let the people know what is going on in the PLs. In addition to that, close relationship with the press, especially with the local press and the mass media, resulted in the increased number of the newcomers.

For the decoration of the PLs grants of the voluntary societies were encouraged. Lions', Rotary Clubs, Soroptomists' Clubs, the Turkish Librarians' Association etc. and other volunteers proved to be real library friends. Some private people even gave buildings as a present to the General Directorate of Libraries, which were in turn named after the owners. Also many municipalities in Turkey helped a lot by offering buildings to open new PLs. Between 1992-1994 many libraries were opened. Many of them were buildings or flats offered by the municipalities. In 1991 there were only 938 PLs, and with this new action in three years, the number of PLs raised to 1148: 246 new libraries started to give PL service in different parts of Turkey.

For the visually handicapped there are special collections in various PLs. The Atatürk Public Library in İzmir is the center for this service. Lions Clubs and Unesco were very helpful in building up these departments.

In order to meet the demands of institutionalized users (prisons, hospitals, institutions for aged people) PLs prepare collections to be borrowed but it is not a nation-wide activity.

In touristic regions such as Antalya, Mersin, etc. there are PL service points, though small in number and in size but very popular.

Since 1992 there have been attempts to attract female users to PLs: the opening of the pre-school children's departments, subscriptions to women's periodicals, recreational reading items seem to help.

There are no special services to meet the demand of ethnic groups or foreigners. In depository libraries there are copies of every item published in Turkey. They are situated only in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir. When one thinks that the regular PL system is

underdeveloped even for Turkish people it is hardly to be expected to find excellent special services for ethnic groups and foreigners.

In order to attract more users to the PLs, libraries subscribed to newspapers which represent different political points of view, which was a success. As the newspapers are expensive in Turkey, to read them without any cost in a library was interesting for people and this fact increased the number of users to a certain extent (*T.C.Kültür*, 1994: 81).

1991: 18.730.918

1992: 20.337.365

1993: 22.752.970

1994: 23.259.597

A very important factor for the development of the collection was the opposition of restricted access to library materials in libraries and the raising of ban over certain books for the sake of Intellectual Freedom since 1992 (Sağlar, 1992: 148, 25, 34-35). In many cases it was the autocensorship applied by the non-professional staff. Also there was the pressure of different governments on PLs. Consequently the number of users increased.

PL buildings are planned together with the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Public Works and Resettlement. A standard project is unfortunately applied everywhere for years, regardless of socio-economic, socio-cultural factors, principles of librarianship, differences of climate and environment and the number of population. There is not one perfect public library building in Turkey. Many buildings are very dull in outer appearance and not functional at all. For the physically-handicapped people there are no special facilities.

In 1993 the General Directorate ordered the construction of prefabricated library buildings in rural areas which was a success. Those practical buildings are cheaper than the usual standard buildings and the construction time is very short: Ankara-Mamak and İzmir-Buca-Tınaztepe PLs are pioneers in this respect in Turkey. Also some suitable buildings were converted to libraries successfully such as the Mersin Province Public Libraries.

The exteriors of the existing library buildings are partly renewed and the interiors were designed according to the modern PL layout in some cases as examples for other libraries.

A new Regulation (5422 sayılı, 1995; Okul, 1986) will help to solve the financial problems concerning the buildings as it would attract businessmen to build up new buildings as they would pay less tax if they would erect a new building for libraries.

Lack of professional staff is the greatest problem in Turkey. Although there are three Library Science Departments in Ankara, Hacettepe and Istanbul Universities, graduates do not prefer to work in the PLs as the salaries are very low. Out of the total number of staff (3509), 503 are graduates of Library Science Departments of Universities and only 74 of them are administrators.² Generally speaking working conditions are unsatisfactory.

Whitten and Minder (1974: 6) define the problem situation concerning the staff as:

Nearly all librarians in Turkey are employees of the national government, whether they work in universities, schools, public libraries, children's libraries or documentation centers. This means that they are regarded, and regard themselves, as bureaucrats or functionaries, with their promotion and salary based largely on seniority. This naturally tends to dampen ambition, reinforce respect for authority, and frustrate any real sense of professionalism, particularly among the lower rank.

² Information gathered from the General Directorate of Libraries, June 1995.

There are irregular courses for PL staff organized by the General Directorate of Libraries but the time is short, the information load is heavy and the students' educational level is not homogenous.

The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) is used for classification and the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules 2 (AACR) is applied for cataloguing. As the number of professional staff is very small, there are serious problems concerning the cataloguing and classification of library materials. Preparations for the production of catalogue cards by computer have been started in 1994. As the collection is purchased centrally by the General Directorate, it is very convenient to prepare the catalogue cards and assign classification numbers for each item by the professional staff.

In Unesco Public Library Manifesto 1994 it is stated that "the decision makers at national and local levels and the library community at large, around the world, are hereby urged to implement the principles expressed in this Manifesto" (Unesco, 1995: 281). The relationship of the librarians with the decision-makers to achieve improvement in the field of public librarianship is not strong at all. Public librarians are not looked upon as a pressure group by the politicians which limits the development of PLs.

If the Turkish Librarians' Association will some day be successful in lobbying for the rights of librarians, an improvement and development concerning library matters could take place in Turkey: There is still no "Public Library Act" in Turkey which could solve some problems concerning the professional situation like in many countries. "Legislative lobbying, which is the process through which citizens seek to persuade legislators to support a given cause" (Intellectual, 1989: 219; see also Schneehorst, 1985: 286) should be undertaken by librarians to defend their rights.

The reform achievements of the recent years should be encouraged and continued for the sake of the *Turkish People's Right to Intellectual Freedom* and for their belief in *Democracy*, which can only prosper in public libraries in Turkey's case.

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