

Charting and Changing Terra Incognita: The New LIFE of the Municipal Public Libraries in Turkey

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Abstract

As the first ever project that maps the previously uncharted territory of the municipal public libraries in Turkey, Project “Libraries for Everyone – LIFE” also aims to catalyze radical transition of these institutions into more relevant centers that address modern community needs, especially by enabling free user access to ICT and the necessary training.

Full proposal

The Project LIFE, which is funded by the Global Libraries Initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is the first systematic effort to define the municipal public libraries in Turkey as a distinct category of libraries. These libraries, which are not even mentioned in official statistical reports, have so far been literally invisible despite their immense potential and considerable services. Designed around the concept of local community needs and inspired by its vision of “local transformation, global access”, the main targets of the Project include the revitalization and empowerment of the municipal public libraries, the development of up-to-date and relevant library services based on needs assessment, and a significant increase in the use of the libraries especially by the disadvantaged groups in local communities. The groups primarily targeted by the project are the unemployed, the elderly, the disabled, and housewives. Since its beginning in February 2016, Project LIFE has been effectively achieving its targets by encouraging a distinct and unified identity for the municipal public libraries, by offering capacity building training to the staff of these libraries, and by guiding and assisting the library staff in the planning and delivery of new services, such as ICT training, to users. In brief, the ultimate goal of the Project LIFE is to affect transition and transformation both in the targeted library institutions and the targeted audiences, so as to serve Turkey’s efforts to evolve into an information society.

In this paper, the conceptual background of the nation-wide activities of the project will be introduced; the effectiveness of the advocacy tools such as the social media used by both the project team and the participating libraries will be illustrated; and the benefits gained from local and national partnership building activities as an essential component of the project works will be explained.

Significance/Impact of Project

In addition to its pioneering role in the charting and changing of the municipal public libraries territory in Turkey, the Project LIFE is also unique in Turkey because of its incorporation of a well-designed and systematic impact assessment component. In line with its ultimate goal, the impact targets of the Project LIFE are two-fold: impact at the libraries and impact on users. The specifics of the impact on libraries include the training of the library staff as trainers, significant increase in the number of users, the wide promotion of new services across local communities, and the upgrading of technology. The impact intended on the users, on the other hand, is based on the improvement of the lives of especially the designated target groups in the impact areas of digital inclusion, education, economic development, and culture and leisure.

Link to the project website/more information on Project

English: <http://www.libraryforeveryone.org> // Turkish: <http://www.herkesicinkutuphane.org>