

Library Associations in Turkey

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Introduction

Sociologists describe the process of organization by means of establishing associations as the "process of modernization of a developing society" (Yücekök, 1972: 3). Associations, which are products of modern social structures, are an indispensable part of our daily life. No matter which profession or occupation they belong to, people spend some part of their times and energies to get involved in professional associations. Thus, they try to find common solutions to professional problems that cannot be resolved by individual efforts. This also is one of the most important characteristics of professionalization (Tonta, 1985: 1).

Most professions, if not all, have professional associations to unify differing objectives of their members and make their voice heard. Major objectives of a professional association are to: 1) guarantee the professional competence of its members; 2) stand for the professional conduct of its members; and 3) to promote the status of the profession (Shaffer, 1968: 74).

Although the profession of "librarianship" is relatively new in Turkey, we Turkish librarians and information professionals have our own professional associations for almost half a century. This paper briefly describes various characteristics and activities of two of those associations; namely, the Turkish Librarians' Association (TLA) and the Association of University and Research Librarians (AURL).

Turkish Librarians' Association

The Turkish Librarians' Association (TLA) was established in Ankara on November 19, 1949. Mr. Adnan Ötügen, the founder of the then newly-opened (August 16, 1948) Turkish National Library, and his dedicated colleagues in that Library were among the Charter Members of TLA.

In the first Bye-Law of the TLA, which appeared in *Ankara Akşam Postası* dated January 11, 1950, the main objective of the Association was determined as "encouraging the professional contact and work among Turkish librarians, working towards the recognition and development of librarianship as a profession in the country and providing possibilities of cooperation among the colleagues."

TLA functioned mainly in Ankara in its Headquarters from 1949 to 1961. TLA's first Bye-Law was revised during the Annual Meeting held in June 3, 1961 so as to allow the Association to reorganize. Thus, TLA obtained the rights to organize not only in Ankara but also in other cities as well.

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The mission of TLA is "to help develop library services and librarianship." In order to fulfill this mission, TLA issues, among other things, scientific and professional publications in library, information, and archival studies, organizes conferences and seminars to increase knowledge and experience of its members, works to protect the rights of its members and all professionals, and cooperates with educational and scientific institutions to promote librarianship (Türk, 1990).

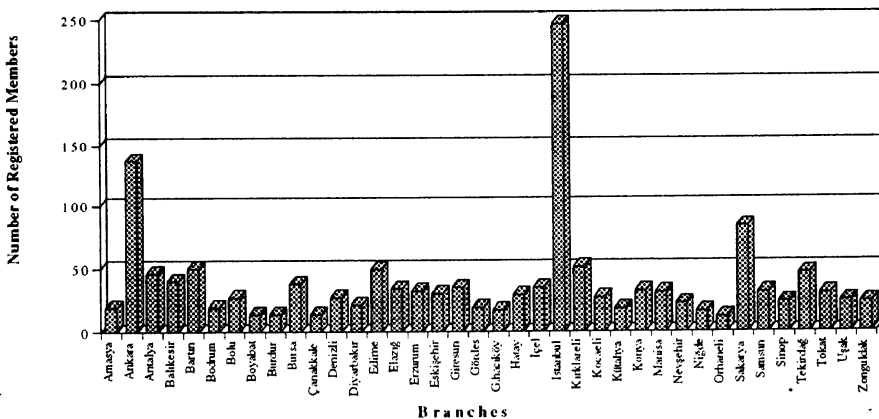
Twenty-six years after it was founded, TLA was recognized, by the Council of Ministers, as a professional association working towards public good. This decision brought with it some rights and privileges for TLA such as exemptions from certain taxes.

TLA has a two-tiered organization: The Headquarters and the Branches. The main organs of the HQ are the General Council, the Executive Committee, the Auditing Board, and the Board of Honour. Branches are structured similarly.

TLA is currently run by a voluntary nine-person Executive Committee, members of which, including the President, are elected during the General Council and serve four-year terms. Delegates representing the branches (including their presidents and secretary generals), members of the organs of the HQ, and ex-presidents of TLA constitute the General Council and it meets at least bi-annually. However, members and delegates usually show little interest in the Branch Council and General Council meetings. On the average, half of the registered members have not attended the Branch Council meetings in the past. Participation in the General Council meetings is not encouraging either. On the average, somewhere between 15% to 40% of the delegates chose to skip the General Council meetings altogether, thereby causing some branches to be either underrepresented in the meetings or not represented at all.

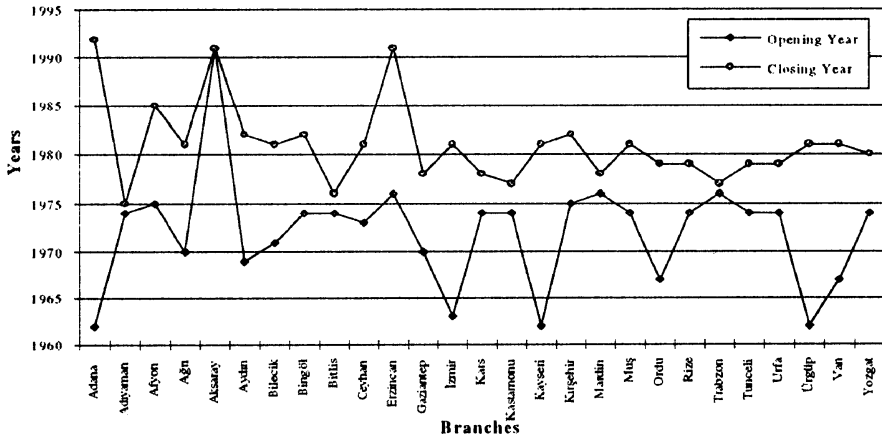
Although TLA claims to be a professional association, anyone can become a member regardless of his/her professional background (i.e., education or experience). Librarians and support staff working in public libraries appear to have been represented heavily in TLA as they constitute a large percentage of the membership. Members are registered through the branches. Currently TLA has 39 branches representing some 1500 members. However, as figure 1 indicates, some branches (Istanbul and Ankara) have more registered members than the others, the average being 40.

Figure 1. Number of Registered Members of the TLA Branches (1994)
(Source: Tonta, Kaygusuz and Berberoğlu, 1995: 18)



It should be stated that organization and establishment of new branches in the past have not necessarily stemmed from real needs in some cases. Some 27 TLA branches were opened and closed in various times between 1961 and 1995 due to mainly inattention of their members, thereby causing TLA to lose some 600 members. As can be seen from figure 2, most TLA branches that are currently closed functioned a short period of time, average being 9 years. They usually had fewer numbers of registered members (average 22) and lacked sound financial resources. Figure 2 also shows the adverse effects of the Turkish political climate of the 1980s on the organization of associations as almost half of the closed branches (13) did so immediately after 1980.

Figure 2. Opening and Closing Years of the Branches of TLA (1961-1995)
(Source: Tonta, Kaygusuz and Berberoğlu, 1995: 10)

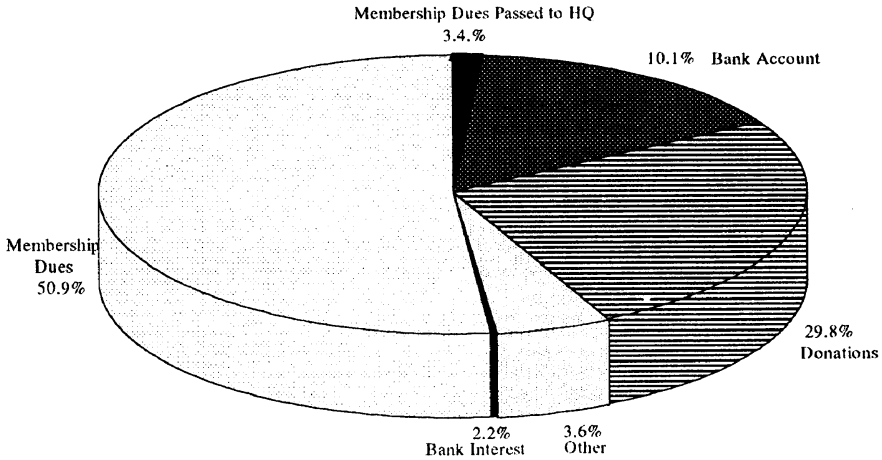


As members subscribe to TLA through the branches, TLA does not benefit directly from the subscription fees that branches collect. Although almost 60% of the income generated by TLA branches come from the subscription fees (see figure 3), only 10% of the net income of the branches is passed to TLA HQ. The income the TLA HQ gets from the branches is almost negligible within the total income of the TLA HQ. Contributions of branches constitute somewhere between 1% and 6% of the overall budget of the TLA HQ. It should be emphasized that the nominal value of subscription fees branches collect from each member is relatively low, to say the least. For instance, the total contribution of all TLA branches to the HQ budget in the period of 1992-1994 is about 400 USD! (This constitutes only 0.85% of the TLA HQ's budget.)

TLA HQ, on the other hand, generates income by publishing some professional books and its quarterly journal *Türk Kütüphaneciliği* (The Turkish Librarianship). It also receives money from the General Directorate of Libraries of the Ministry of Culture in exchange for providing some services.

Needless to say, the lack of financial support from members does not only affect the number and variety of services that TLA HQ could otherwise provide, but also it puts the Association in a weaker position when it comes to lobbying for the rights of librarians due to insufficient resources. For instance, all members of the TLA Executive Committee are volunteers. TLA cannot afford to hire a full-time permanent chief executive officer to run the HQ.

Figure 3. Income of TLA Branches by Types (1992-1994)
(Source: Tonta, Kaygusuz and Berberoğlu, 1995: 21)



As for the services that TLA offers, it is not an exaggeration to say that its services and impact on Turkish librarianship have been limited. Some special interest groups have been created in the past to discuss specific problems and solve them. But they rarely, if at all, convened. TLA organizes annual library weeks regularly for the last 31 years. TLA also publishes its quarterly journal *Türk Kütüphaneciliği* since 1952. It has been a member of IFLA from the very beginning years of its foundation (1951).

TLA is in the process of restructuring. The Working Group on Restructuring was formed in late 1994 and charged with the task of studying the existing structure of TLA from the viewpoints of its organization, membership system, financial situation, and activities so as to gather data and come up with the preliminary suggestions for restructuring. The Working Group has prepared its very first report and submitted it to the Executive Committee in March 1995 (Tonta, Kaygusuz, and Berberoğlu, 1995; see also: Aslan, 1995). The Executive Committee adopted the report and decided to send it to members through TLA branches and other interested parties to get further input and discuss the matter on a wider basis. The report offers, without elaboration, three choices:

- 1) do nothing;
- 2) keep the existing structure but change the system of delegation and representation of members in General Councils, thereby making the Association a more participative and democratic institution; and,
- 3) abolish the existing branches, dissolve the present structure, and reorganize as a truly professional library association.

It is expected that all the members and interested parties study the findings presented in the report carefully and help find a better way to reorganize and restructure to become a more effective and efficient professional organization.

TLA has been serving the Turkish librarianship for almost half a century. If it cannot cope with the changes and developments around us, both the TLA and the profession will suffer from that. The Turkish librarians ought to organize better under the umbrella of a professional association and combine their energies if they wish to promote the library and information services that our society badly needs and to defend their professional rights. Almost everyone is dissatisfied with the services of TLA. However, if we wish to restructure TLA, it is our duty to work towards this goal and provide input. It should be remembered that the best way to improve the system that we are not happy with is to take part in it and try to change for the better.

Association of University and Research Librarians

Association of University and Research Librarians (AURL) was founded in August 8, 1991 in Ankara. It currently has over 300 members.

The main objectives of the Association are as follows:

- a) to examine the information technology-related problems of university and research libraries, documentation centers and special libraries;
- b) to compare these problems and their solutions with those of other countries;
- c) to review and seek solutions to the problems of personnel working in such information centers; and,
- d) to perform some activities on the application of new technologies.

The Association organizes conferences, seminars, panels and symposia for the education and training of university and research librarians and their support personnel. In addition, it also aims to issue professional publications (original or translations) on information technology and its impact on library and information services ("Üniversite", 1992).

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