

Opportunities of Collaboration with Public Libraries on Government and Governance

Umut Al

Hacettepe University, Department of Information Management, Ankara, Turkey.
umutal@hacettepe.edu.tr

Seda Öz

Hacettepe University, Department of Communication Sciences, Ankara, Turkey.
sedaoz@hacettepe.edu.tr

Zehra Taşkın

Hacettepe University, Department of Information Management, Ankara, Turkey.
ztaskin@hacettepe.edu.tr



Copyright © 2016 by Umut Al, Seda Öz and Zehra Taşkın.

This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

Global Libraries as a program takes on an important task by supporting public libraries on an international level. In July 2013, Turkey became a part of this program with the “Librar-e Turkey Planning and Pilot Project.” The project was finalized on December 31, 2015 and as part of the pilot implementation, several works were conducted including trainings, workshops, online courses and webinars for library personnel. Experiences acquired during the project were shared in different platforms as reports, articles, and bulletins. As a result, the Project passed into history as the most comprehensive project for the public libraries in Turkey.

Works within the scope of Global Libraries Initiative have been carried out in accordance with the structures known as CIMS (Common Impact Measurement System) and PM (Performance Metrics). With PM, the effects/impacts of the support from the Global Libraries Initiative and other resources were questioned and with CIMS the work results of different countries were analysed in a standardized manner. There are seven research categories in CIMS, namely, digital inclusion, education, health, government and governance, economic progress, culture and leisure, and communication. For the analysis of the impact of project works in these impact areas, two basic questionnaires were conducted by the Project. The first of the library usage questionnaires was conducted in 2014 with 2670 participants and the other in 2015 with 2666 participants.

This study will dwell on the subject of government and governance, which is one of the impact areas in CIMS. In addition to the findings of the questionnaires, collaboration opportunities to attract potential public library users by way of their benefiting from the e-government services and using these services effectively will be discussed.

Keywords: Public libraries, government and governance, user studies, public libraries in Turkey, e-government services.

Introduction

Public libraries are institutions responsible for providing services to every segment of the society without regardless of people's language, religion, age or race. Institutions that aim to remain relevant should not and cannot isolate themselves from the environment that they belong. Like many other institutions, public libraries should observe the requirements and changes in their society and respond to them accordingly.

In our world, public libraries have the mission to eliminate or reduce the gaps that are being observed between different levels of societies. The use of the public library by disadvantaged people to benefit from the computer and internet based services is an important example of the contribution that has been done by the public libraries to the process of information socialization.

In this paper, general information regarding the Librar-e Turkey Planning and Pilot Project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is presented, and the e-government works in Turkey are summarised. The works in the pilot project related to e-government services are also analysed in the light of the data regarding the library usage research.

Global Libraries Initiative

Global Libraries Initiative is a program of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and it gives significant support to libraries across the globe. The first grant by the program was given in 1997. Between 1997 and 2015, 891 institutions –most of them part of the Global Libraries Initiative- received grants. Among these, projects called “Improvement of Computer Usage and Public Internet Access in Vietnam,” “Program of Access to Digital Services in Public Libraries,” and “The Library Development Program” are especially notable with their high grant amounts. These projects were conducted in Vietnam, Mexico and Poland respectively and all of them received grants of around 30 million US dollars each (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015a).

Global Libraries Initiative supports projects related to public libraries in a wide range of countries such as Bulgaria, Jamaica, and South Africa. These supports have been provided through different projects, institutions and private entities. Among the institutions that the Global Libraries Initiative is in collaboration, READ Global, eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries), IREX, IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations), OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) and Microsoft (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015b) can be given as examples.

The main goal of the Global Libraries Initiative is to provide effective reach to the information and communication technologies via public libraries for people in different countries who do not have any or limited access to these technologies, and make possible the use of the technologies to improve people's lives. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015c; Jacobs, 2010). In this context, according to the Global Libraries Atlas data, only between 2001 and 2003, there was more than 30.000 library staff who received training. With the

opportunities that Global Libraries Initiative provided, more than 100.000 people benefited from the activities that were realized (Global Libraries Atlas, 2015).

Librar-e Turkey Planning and Pilot Project

Librar-e Turkey project started as of July 2013 and lasted 28 months. Project works were conducted at 78 public libraries situated in 26 different cities which represented the general demographics of the country according to the Statistical Zone Unit Classification of Turkey (TİBBS) Level II (NUTS - The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics). The pilot project mainly aimed to plan toward and detect possible problems that may arise during a possible country implementation. Parallel with this general aim, it was also intended to strengthen the ICT infrastructure of the public libraries, and undertake relevant works that may help public library staff and users in terms of developing their computer-internet-information literacy (Librar-e Turkey, 2015a).

There were four working groups within the project and each of them had their own duties and responsibilities. These were Advocacy, ICT (Information & Communication Technologies), Training and Impact Assessment working groups. Advocacy work group was mainly responsible for the promotion activities related to the project. Among these duties, by benefitting from the experiences of other Global Libraries Initiative projects, the advocacy working group was responsible for creating partnerships with government and private entities on a national level. They also used television, radio and social media to draw a clear picture of the project for the society, create local and national awareness regarding the project, change and /or expand the perception of decision makers and the society, and contribute to the sustainability of the project. Training work group first evaluated the training needs of the library staff and the citizens. Designing and delivering sustainable onsite and online training programs based on the results of the evaluation were also this working group's responsibility. The use of information and communications technology had a crucial place in the project. In this context, the project formed an information and communication technology working group and assigned significant duties to this group. Among these duties were analysing existing systems in terms of their efficiency, improving them as necessary, testing all the project public libraries' information and communications technology competency, providing necessary and efficient information and communications technology to public libraries by taking into consideration other similar projects' experiences, planning technical support in case of necessity, planning the maintenance and repair training for the library staff, and planning all the other relevant and important services for the effective use of information and communications technology. The Impact Assessment working group was not only responsible for the evaluation of the project's success in reaching its objectives and goals but also for the follow up and documentation of these results. The Impact Assessment group mainly dealt with creating an evaluation system that could accomplish an impact analysis by considering other Global Libraries projects' experiences, data gathering, analysing and reporting, displaying the pilot project's impacts to be able to gain the support of relevant institutions to ensure sustainability, and creating a comprehensive tracking, assessment and evaluation strategy for a possible country program implementation after the pilot phase (Librar-e Turkey, 2015b).

Within the scope of the pilot project, first of all the project management unit and the advocacy working group visited the pilot project libraries and gathered data regarding the needs and expectations of each library. In addition to face to face advocacy and training meetings, webinars in different subject were also conducted. The first webinar was held in

July 2014, which was followed by 25 more webinars till November 2015, and the staff of the pilot libraries was very interested in these webinars.

Another important milestone of the pilot project was the earning of the Presidential Guardianship. After significant works and efforts, “Librar-e Turkey Planning and Pilot Project” was successfully taken under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey in February 2014 (Librar-e Turkey, 2015c).

Internet Usage and e-Government Services in Turkey

Opportunities provided by information and communications technologies bring new expansions in terms of public administration. Due to information and communications technologies, not only new communications means arise between governments and societies, but also, works and operations become faster, engagement during policy determination and decision making is heightened, transparency is foregrounded, relevant social sector and citizen participation to the decisions is made possible. It is necessary to adapt to these changes to form new organizational structures that can increase the life quality of citizens and social welfare, re-design service and business processes, and realise public administration reforms which are integrated, sustainable, extensive and in parallel with the requirements of the age.

From this point of view, the new public administration channel known as e-government represents a process not only of technological but also of structural change (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Development, 2014). For a smooth transition to this new structural transformation process and for the effective use of e-government services, there first needs to be citizens who have internet literacy. One of the most challenging obstacles in the way of extending e-government services is the existence of a massive population that has no access to the internet, and thus cannot use it, let alone internet literacy.

As of April 2016, Turkey celebrated the 23rd anniversary of the internet. While the percentage of internet usage rate of the population was 5% in 2001, in 2015 it was more than 50% (see Figure 1). According to November 2015 statistics, the percentage of internet users in Turkey’s population is 59.6% (Internet World Stats, 2016). When looked at comparatively, it can easily be seen that Turkey stands way below the European average (%73.5) (see Figure 2).

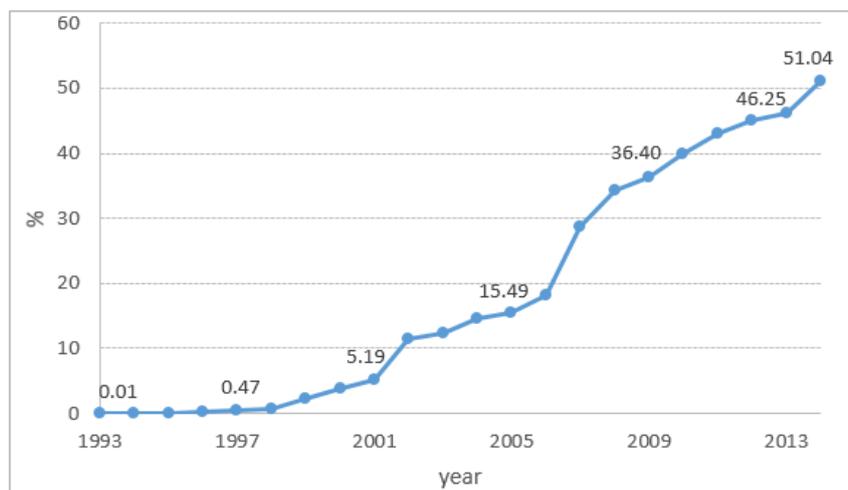


Figure 1. Internet users as percentage of population (The World Bank, 2016)

As it can be seen from Figure 2, internet penetration rate of the European countries, particularly the Scandinavian ones, is quite above Turkey. This situation reveals that there is much to do in terms of popularizing internet use in Turkey. At this point, e-government services should be seen as an important opportunity to popularize internet use, because, some procedures (such as Social Security Institution-SSI insurance check) can only be performed through the main e-government system.

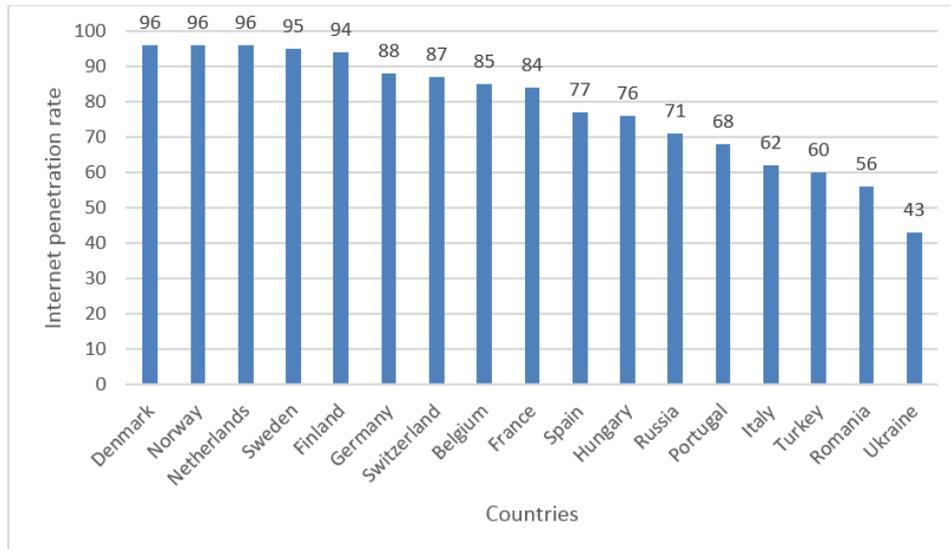


Figure 2. Internet penetration rate of some European countries (Internet World Stats, 2016)

Research and works regarding e-government in Turkey started on December 18, 2008 and since that date it offers services on <https://www.turkiye.gov.tr/>. As of April 2016, the central e-government system has 231 institutions, 1430 services, and 27,437,174 registered users. And, increase in the registered users over the years is striking (see Figure 3). Among the most frequently used services through this e-government office are tax delinquency check, retirement pension check, court file check, and mobile line check.

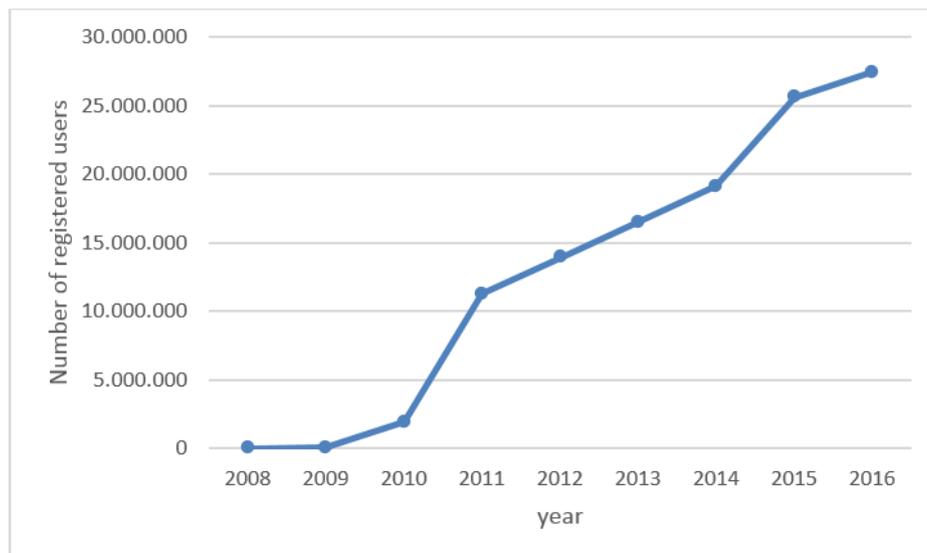


Figure 3. The annual increase in the total number of registered users at The Turkish e-Government Gateway (e-Devlet Kapısı, 2016; Republic of Turkey Ministry of Development, 2014)

To access personal information or integrated electronic services through e-government office which require safety, authentication tools such as e-signature or mobile signature are needed. With only one authentication (password, e-signature, mobile signature etc.), it is possible to benefit from a good deal of integrated electronic services from the same address. Moreover, when it is necessary to make payment (tax, fee etc.) for the electronic services of the e-government office, this payment procedure can again be handled through e-government office from a secure medium.

When the population of Turkey is thought in comparison with the population that uses e-government services, it is easy to observe that there is still a huge amount of people who do not meet with these services. Under these circumstances, raising awareness for the use of e-government services to a desirable level is a priority.

Methodology

Within the scope of the project, two library usage questionnaires were conducted. The first of the library usage questionnaires was conducted in 2014 with 2670 participants and the other in 2015 with 2666 participants (Al & Soydal, 2014, p. 292; Al & Soydal 2015, p. 440). During the design of the questions, a structure called CIMS (Common Impact Measurement System), which was created by the Global Libraries Initiative after long research and analysis process, had a significant role. Since this work is on project basis, and the granter wants to see the results of the same questionnaire at different countries, basic field questions which are a part of the CIMS were used during the design of the questionnaire. Implementation of the questionnaire was carried out under the responsibility of a professional firm, and the employees of the firm that was contracted went to the project libraries and conducted the questionnaires with library visitors. While library visitors were filling in the questionnaires, an expert stood by and answered the questions of the users immediately. During the implementation of the questionnaire, at least 100 public library users in every city which were involved in the project were reached, without taking into consideration the cities' population. A document called "Overview of Global Libraries Performance Metrics (PMs) and the Common Impact Measurement System (CIMS)" (Global Libraries, 2013) was consulted while determining these numbers. In this document, for the questionnaires which are to be applied at the grantee countries, it is suggested to receive at least 400 answers without taking into consideration a country wide sample rate. But, for the sake of a healthier evaluation and analysis in the context of our work, and to increase the representation rate, a much higher number was determined for the focus of the pilot project. Thus the questionnaires were applied to at least 100 people in each city. While determining this number, project budget and calendar were also taken into consideration. As a result, public library usage research was conducted at pilot project libraries with the participation of 5336 respondents.

Public library usage research (Al & Soydal, 2014; Al & Soydal 2015) which is being held as a part of the pilot project, is the most comprehensive user research that has been held in Turkey until now. Even though, significantly detailed data has been gathered through these researches, in this work it will be dwelled on government and governance which is also another CIMS impact area.

Findings

Every single impact area of the CIMS has many metrics. There are two types of metrics; optional and required. Within the scope of the public library usage research in Turkey, only the obligatory metrics about government and governance were collected. Metrics about the government and governance impact area can be found at Table 1.

Table 1. CIMS indicators related to government and governance

Metrics	Required/ Optional
# of library visitors who search for government information (e.g., laws or regulations, descriptions of government programs and services, forms, government jobs) using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet, Facebook)	Required
# of library visitors who use a government service (e.g., download/ fill out/ submit forms, pay taxes, request documents/licenses) through technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet, Facebook)	Required
# of library visitors who participate in governance processes (e.g., research politicians or citizens' rights, interact with public authorities or elected officials, learn how to volunteer for political events, participate in political movements) using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet, Facebook)	Required
# of library visitors who save time by accessing a government service using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet)	Required
# of library visitors who receive money/subsidies/support owed to them by the government as a result of their ability to access government services using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet)	Required
# of library visitors who share government information that they found using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet)	Optional
# of library visitors who save money by accessing a government service using technology at the public library	Optional
# of library visitors who are satisfied with the government services they access using technology at the public library	Optional
# of library visitors who found a job by searching for government information using technology at the public library	Optional
# of library visitors who exercise their citizens' rights as a result of the information they found using technology at the public library	Optional

While the data about the metrics in government and governance impact area in CIMS was analysed, it was seen that important acquisitions were gained by library users. For example, with these two research questionnaires, it was found out that there were 455 library users who used libraries for technology related government services. This number corresponds to 8.5% among library users (see Table 2). Even though the rates are low, the existence “of library visitors who receive money/subsidies/support owed to them by the government as a result of their ability to access government services using technology at the public library” is considered important.

Table 2. Findings about government and governance indicators

Metrics	n	%
# of library visitors who use a government service (e.g., download/ fill out/ submit forms, pay taxes, request documents/licenses) through technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet, Facebook)	455	8.5
# of library visitors who search for government information (e.g., laws or regulations, descriptions of government programs and services, forms, government jobs) using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet, Facebook)	305	5.7
# of library visitors who save time by accessing a government service using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet)	251	4.7
# of library visitors who participate in governance processes (e.g., research politicians or citizens' rights, interact with public authorities or elected officials, learn how to volunteer for political events, participate in political movements) using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet, Facebook)	118	2.2
# of library visitors who receive money/subsidies/support owed to them by the government as a result of their ability to access government services using technology at the public library (e.g., WiFi, computer, Internet)	52	1.0

When the library users were asked about the purpose for which they used the technology in the public libraries, it was found out that the most prominent increase from 2014 to 2015 was in the option “use a government service (e.g., download/ fill out/ submit forms, pay taxes, or request documents/licenses)” (see Table 3). It is possible to explain the increase rate (from 4% to %13) in this section with the diffusion of e-government services and designed trainings which were being delivered at libraries formally or non-formally for the use of e-government services. At this point, it is striking that the 14% of the trainings given to the public library users at the pilot project libraries was on e-government, and this shows the importance given to the subject by the public libraries. On the other hand, data gathered from the surveys which were conducted with the library staff to analyse the benefits of the project works indicated that the opportunities of the citizens to benefit from e-government services had increased.

The speed with which the outreach of e-government services expand within the society is also remarkable. In a document which was prepared by the Ministry of Development, Division of Information Society (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Development, 2014b), it is stated that the number of registered users increased from 15,5 million at the end of the September 2013, to 19,1 million as of October 2014. According to the document, this increase is a result of the e-government password distribution to students aged between 15-18, transfer of the tuition fee loan checks of the Higher Education Credits and Dormitories Agency to the e-government platform, and the mandatory military service check of the Ministry of Defence to this platform. As of April 2016, there are 231 institutions, 1430 services and 27,437,174 registered users at the e-government office (e-Devlet Kapısı, 2016). It is thought that public libraries can contribute to the effective use of the e-government office both by activities for raising awareness and by the provision of trainings for the use of e-government services. The data (requests for trainings about the “use a government service (e.g., download/ fill out/ submit forms, pay taxes, or request documents/licenses)” reached from the library usage research (Al & Soydal, 2015, p. 453) is another indicator that shows the public interest in the subject.

Table 3. Technology related activities at the public libraries in the last year

I have used technology (e.g., WiFi, Internet, computers, Facebook, Skype) at the public library in the last 12 months to:	2014 (%)	2015 (%)
learn about the news	30	28
create online content	24	23
communicate with my family and friends using email	18	14
communicate with my family and friends using Skype, Facebook or other online tools (excluding email)	10	12
search for government information	7	5
communicate with others for business purposes	5	4
buy products or services	4	4
use a government service (e.g., download/ fill out/ submit forms, pay taxes, or request documents/licenses)	4	13
apply to postsecondary programs	4	4
search for informal education resources	4	6
search for agricultural information	3	2
apply for postsecondary scholarships	3	2
participate in governance processes	3	2
communicate with family and friends who live far away or abroad	3	2
search for information that will help me to create a resume or CV	2	3
access online banking services	2	2
sell products or services	2	1
promote my services or products	1	1
identify potential customers for my business	1	1
identify potential business partners or employees	1	1

Conclusion

Librar-e Turkey is a project which mainly aims to conduct research on how public libraries can be turned into centres of attraction for users by offering free access to information and communications technologies. Even though the project is a pilot one and has time constraints which obstructs receiving long-term results of the works, it is obvious that this project brings a new perspective to the public libraries and public library staff in Turkey. Also, it should be noted that, since this project is a pilot implementation, the main aim was more about understanding what can be done in the future instead of what had been done during the planning phase.

Libraries have a strong contribution potential for creating awareness about the e-Government Office among the citizens and for the use of these services in their full potential. In this context, it should be noted that the e-government trainings during the pilot project gained significant demand. Also, users requested other trainings for further development about the subject.

Data gathered from the pilot project opened a path for the design and implementation of a country wide plan. As a result, with the project entitled Libraries for Everyone (LIFE) which started as of 2016, new activities started to be conducted toward needs assessments that also includes government and governance impact area. For the sustainability of the project, Turkish Librarians Association will have an active role during and after the project timeline.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank to Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their financial support and to Dr. Sinan Akıllı for his meticulous reading of a draft version of this paper.

References

- Al, U. & Soydal, İ. (2015). Kütüphan-e Türkiye Projesi Etki Değerlendirme Çalışmaları: Halk kütüphanesi kullanım araştırması [Librar-e Turkey Project Impact Assessment Studies: Public library usage research] *Türk Kütüphaneciliği*, 29 (3), 433-460.
- Al, U. & Soydal, İ. (2014). Kütüphan-e Türkiye Projesi: Halk kütüphanesi kullanım araştırması [Librar-e Turkey Project: Public library usage survey]. *Türk Kütüphaneciliği*, 28 (3), 288-307.
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2015a). Awarded grants. Retrieved from: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/How-We-Work/Quick-Links/Grants-Database>
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2015b). Partners. Retrieved from: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Global-Libraries/Global-Libraries-Partners>
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2015c). Strategy overview. Retrieved from: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Global-Libraries>
- e-Devlet Kapısı. (2016). Devletin kısayolu. [Shortcut of government]. Retrieved from: <https://www.turkiye.gov.tr/>
- Global Libraries Atlas. (2015). Global Libraries Atlas: Executive summary. Retrieved from: <https://www.glatlas.org/PortfolioReports/ExecutiveSummary#Overview>
- Global Libraries. (2013). Overview of Global Libraries Performance Metrics (PMs) and the Common Impact Measurement System (CIMS). Retrieved from: <https://spaces.gatesfoundation.org/docs/DOC-3448>
- Internet World Stats. (2016). Internet users in Europe November 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm#europe>
- Jacobs, D. (2010). Libraries for the people - The Global Libraries Initiative at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. *Bibliothek Forschung und Praxis*, 34 (1), 26-31.
- Librar-e Turkey. (2015a). Genel bilgi. [General information]. Retrieved from: <http://www.kutuphaneturkiye.org.tr/genel-bilgi/>
- Librar-e Turkey. (2015b). Çalışma grupları. [Working groups]. Retrieved from: <http://www.kutuphaneturkiye.org.tr/>
- Librar-e Turkey. (2015c). Kütüphan-e Türkiye Projesi (KTP) portfolyosu. [Portfolio of Librar-e Turkey]. Retrieved from: <http://www.kutuphaneturkiye.org.tr/portfolyo/>
- Republic of Turkey Ministry of Development. (2014a). Retrieved from: <http://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-42105sgc.pdf>
- Republic of Turkey Ministry of Development. (2014b). Kamu hizmetlerinde e-Devlet uygulamaları. Retrieved from: http://www.bilgitoplumu.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2015_Yili_Programi_BIT_e-Devlet.pdf
- The World Bank. (2016). Turkey. Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/turkey>