Chapter 35
Public Access ICT in Turkey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Turkey is a modern, dynamic country in southwestern Asia with a broad-based, healthy economy that supports a population of just over 70 million. The country spans 780,500 sq km (slightly larger than Texas) and is bordered by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Syria, the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. The land is mostly mountainous with a narrow coastal plain and a central high plateau. The climate is temperate and more than 53% of the land is said to be arable.

Turkey is governed as a parliamentary democracy with a strong tradition of secularism. The president is elected to a five-year term and is the head of state. A unicameral legislative body seats 550 representatives.

In 2007, the GDP exceeded US$400 million, derived primarily from a robust international trade in agricultural products and mineral resources. While Turkey has some light industry and tourist income, most of its revenue stream is based on oil and natural gas production, as well as gold, copper, coal, and numerous other minerals.

Turkey moved towards a market-based economy in the 1980s, but in the 1990s, the country experienced rapid growth and also faced financial crises and economic recessions. After 2001, the economy began to recover and employment increased. The Turkish economy now shows a strong and stable growth with notable foreign investments due to improvements in the banking, retail, and telecommunication sectors.

The interest in information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Turkey began in the early 1980s, but with the spread of the Internet, that interest accelerated in the business world, which led individuals to use computers in the cybercafés, as well as to own computers. The government has prioritized ICTs in education, in businesses, and the public sector, and encourages capacity building among the population. Although there are regional and socio-economic differences in adopting ICTs, the general trend seems to be positive and moving forward.

Turkey was selected to participate in this international study to assess the ability of the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-771-5.ch035

public to access information and communication venues, and also to review the role of ICTs across the overall economic, political, and regulatory framework. The researchers assessed how the venues function, how they serve user needs, how they meet operational constraints, how they realize successes, and how they meet the needs of underserved communities and groups.

The study was intended to investigate issues related to the Public Internet Access Centers (PIACs), which were created when the Turkish eTransformation action plan was launched a couple of years before this study was initiated. The plan called for opening 4,500 PIACS with each one having 20 computers, a projector, a laser printer, a multi-media library, and a trainer on staff. The purpose of the PIACs was to offer free access to public information and to train the public on basic computer, language, and vocational skills. Each center grants a certificate to those who successfully complete the courses. Just over half of the planned PIACs at these venues have been launched.

The objective of this present study was to examine the services, facilities, and technologies at these venues and to provide a context for their effectiveness, especially as they are able to meet the needs of the underserved communities and groups.

Methodology

This study began in 2008, and is part of a global effort to examine public access to information in 25 countries. In Turkey, the information was gathered through interviews with stakeholders, venue operators, and users, while drawing on the expertise of professionals involved in e-transformation, e-government, e-development, and digital-divide issues. These professionals came from academia, the prime minister's office, the Ministry of Education, public libraries, and international organizations interested in advancing ICT usage in Turkey. The interviews were conducted by email, Skype, and telephone, as well as in person.

The primary information sources include the senior public-sector professionals who are responsible for planning, implementing, and monitoring the PIACs. Most of the literature reviewed was based on reports from government agencies. However, the researchers reviewed published documents, online resources, and mainstream newspapers. Secondary data sources included the Internet, newspapers, reports, and published statistics.

The researchers selected libraries, municipalities, and public training centers as the three key venues for the study, but they had difficulty collecting valid data on ethnic origins, cast inequities, and health-related information. A questionnaire-based survey was conducted to obtain information regarding the venues, who the users were, and how the venues were used.

After the venues were selected, the researchers contacted twenty specific venues to conduct telephone interviews in eight different locations – four in urban areas and four in non-urban areas. In each location, each of the venue types was surveyed to collect data from the venue operator and forty venue users.

The researchers visited all eight locations; however, they were not able to complete a survey of each type of venue in each location because of time constraints, lack of a suitable number of venue users, and several other limitations. Nevertheless, the researchers were able to visit six urban venues and six non-urban venues across a reasonable distribution of each targeted type of venue. A separate questionnaire was used for surveying the operator or responsible person at each of the venues visited.