



**Local Development
Organization**
منظمة التنمية المحلية

The Fourth Session Report of Governance Platform and Local Administration Experiences

**Turkish Experience of Local
Administration and Municipalities**

2020/3/23

Introduction:

Local Councils represent the main administrative core in the liberated areas. The local councils have been developed during the Syrian revolution in many aspects such as administrative and organizational and in their relationship with local communities. After many years of this experience, it has been necessary for it to be examined in a professional way to deduce lessons learned and improve the experience as well as to have a look of some successful regional experiences in local administration in order to improve it in Syria. Therefore, Local Development Organization (LDO) in cooperation with Services and Local Administration Ministry in Syrian Interim Government (SIG) decided to hold sessions of governance forum and local councils in order to display the comparative experiences of local administration in some countries such as the Turkish experience in local administration and municipalities. On March ,23th,2020, an online session, entitled The Turkish Experience in Local Administration and municipalities, was held through GOTOMEETING program with Dr. Murad Dawood, the professor and expert of local administration and municipalities.

1. The History of Local Administration in Turkey

The local administration in Turkey, was known in the mid-19th century in the period of the Ottoman Empire and that was after its emerging in some European countries. At that time, the principles of local administration and municipal services started in Turkish areas. Organizations, non-governmental institutions and religious endowments, Alawqaf, were managing the municipal services while the state monitored the general criteria of services, but this system had some administrative and service problems. Later, the provided services were improved at the beginning of the Modern Turkish State by adopting the new European system as a result of the presence of many Western diplomats and experts in Istanbul. This led to the application of European system of local administration by learning from its experience in local administration and expanding the terms of reference of municipal institutions. Many Turkish intellectuals, who studied in Europe in the late 19th century had contributed in it.

2. Local Administration Develop in Turkey

At the beginning of the modern system, municipalities were established in many cities gradually, and the modern municipalities system was developed, its organizational structure was created and the concept of decentralization had been strengthened.

The local administration experience began to develop in Turkey until the ^{six} decade of the last century of where municipalities have been managed by the mayor (Wali). Later, the authority of mayor and municipalities were separated strengthening the decentralization system. At the beginning of 80th of the last century, which was a critical turning point and after the military coup and issuing a new constitution, special municipal texts were formed and strong municipalities were established in terms of authorities and finance. The need of bigger municipals appeared in the presence of many small municipalities in the same city in 1984 and that was in three cities (Istanbul – Ankara – Izmir). That was due to the necessity to overall view of planning and greater funding for services as well as coordination among the smaller different municipalities in these big cities. Thus, municipalities were arranged at two levels and the law distributed authorities between the big municipal and the small municipalities. The big municipalities were considered umbrella of coordination among the small municipalities in the same province and responsible for implementing services related to several municipalities or the whole province. The services related to the whole province were one of the big municipal's authorities while the services related only to an area or specific restrict are one of the small municipalities responsibilities. There were some cases of sharing roles and authorities in some services among big and small municipalities. For example, waste collection is one of the small municipal responsibilities, while waste handling is one of the big municipal responsibilities because waste handing needs big capabilities.

Many services were the responsibilities of big municipalities such as transportation, major roads, water and many other services that required large financial expenditures and the distribution of responsibility between the big and the smaller municipalities within the same city. Whereas the department of social and cultural affairs was the responsibility of smaller

municipalities because it was closer to the citizen and does not require significant investment or large-scale planning.

This step in 1980 was the start of the municipalities development in Turkey. The second step started after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) took control in 2002. Then, the administration and decentralization system was strengthened, and series of laws were issued giving the municipalities more authorities and expanding the application of the big municipalities. the law of municipalities union was adopted as an important mechanism to a successful cooperation among municipalities despite that there has been a legal text about it in the constitution since 1970s, but there has not been a special law organizing it. It is a platform for inter-municipal cooperation and a means of sharing experiences and information among them, but this experience has not been successful because of the conflicting political trends of some municipalities.

3.The Most Important Reasons for the Development of Municipalities in Turkey

- 1- Big municipalities have allocated a proportion of collected taxes in the province for the central government while municipalities get regular funding from the central government for their projects raising the capabilities of the municipalities.
- 2- The development of municipalities in Istanbul and Ankara contributed in transferring their successful experiences to the rest of the municipalities in other states.
- 3- One of the most important political factors which contributed to develop the municipalities in Turkey has been the opposition's efforts represented by Welfare and Justice Party to improve services, gain citizens' satisfaction and strengthen its relations with them, and thus the key of success has been in the strong relations with citizens and strengthening the democratic dimension.
- 4- - Developing the white table service, the one window, in Istanbul at that time in order to improve relations with citizens, follow up their complaints and secure services for them. Later, this service has spread to the whole country. Thus, Istanbul municipality

has been an important laboratory for the development of municipalities. Therefore, this mechanism has been transferred to the central government via establishing the communication office in the Cabinet to follow up citizens' complaints in all ministries and departments.

4 - Challenges and deficiencies in the Turkish experience:

- 1- The weakness of the local democracy, where it does not reinforce the role of local councils in municipalities as a representative to pursue the citizens will. The local democracy should be advanced on services, as it is the basis, whereas the provision of services should come through it. However, the role of local councils is weak in front of the emergence of the municipal head role, as his authority is more robust and larger. The councils have no role in compared to the municipal head role, which helped the emergence of pressure groups affected the work of the municipalities (such as contractors or suppliers, etc.).
- 2- Election of the municipal head separately from the municipal council strengthened his disengagement from the councils. Sometimes the municipal head elected from a different political trend, which leads to conflicts of vision and interests and the weakness of councils. This issue is resulting in the personalization of decisions and its unprofessionalism.
- 3- The weakness of the cooperation between municipalities, as the cooperation mechanisms in the law, were established through national or regional municipal unions. However, the cooperation mechanisms were not activated well due to the lack of cooperation culture and the focus on people rather than institutions, so it was formal and ineffective. It is noteworthy that the cooperation mechanisms is an essential factor in European countries; unifying efforts and exchanging information and experiences can be through it. The only exception was the water management unions, which was successful and practical; these unions are only located in areas where there are no major municipalities.
- 4- Currently, the ruling Justice and Development Party is the localities party, as it has succeeded due to its success in the municipalities. The party has formatted an experienced administrative and executive cadre in the municipalities and services for more than ten years of its work. The party started the second stage several years ago by strengthening its centre instead of the localities by withdrawing some of the localities authority and giving

them to the centre. This step led to decline the development of municipalities and localities in Turkey and to stop the development of administrative innovation in the Turkish municipal experience, which currently relies on its previous achievements when the localities were the basic engine for the country renaissance.

The strengths and weaknesses of the Turkish experience can be summarized as follows:

The strengths point of the Turkish experience:

1. There is a strong legal system similar to that of the European local administration.
2. Local administrations have wide powers, independence, and financial resources.
3. The central state has only a monitoring role on the localities.
4. The presence of the major municipalities led to the renaissance of the major cities, starting with three cities, then expanding to 16; currently, 30 provinces have major municipalities.
5. Formating the municipal service companies or general economic institutions in the municipalities to provide services (transportation, waste, etc.), which is considered a type of methods diversification of providing services and improving their quality.

The weaknesses point of the Turkish experience:

1. The weakness of municipal councils in compared to the prominent role of the council chairman.
2. Focusing on the chairman within the administration or the executive body and the lack of balance within the administrative body (the deputies and the chairman's assistant were without any authority)
3. The weakness of the cooperation mechanisms between different municipalities.

5 - Open discussion on the Turkish experience:

The question was asked about the influence extent of the government form on giving authorities to councils and municipalities (the parliamentary system - the presidential or republican system). Do the constitutional foundations and guarantees in Turkey have a real impact on protecting the achievements during the past years:

Dr. Murad replied that the localities and the center are not competitors to each other, but instead they must be complementary to each other; when there is a competition between

them, problems and deficiencies begin. Localities are the key to the success of the economy and services, where controlling and protecting this process is done by writing it in the constitution. As for the extent of municipalities authority in the presidential or parliamentary system, it depends on the country's culture and practice. In both cases, there are good samples for municipalities in the world.

A question was also asked about the self-resources of municipalities. What percentage of services, which constituted from the self-resources? As well as, the percentage of resources, which constituted from the central government.

Dr. Murad replied that in general, the municipalities dependence on central financing compared to local revenues is greater in the larger municipalities, where their financial connection to the central government is much stronger than the smaller municipalities. In comparison, the smaller municipalities differ according to (economic movement - tourism - and other factors). The financial strength of small municipalities depends on the duration of the power of innovation, and central financing for small municipalities causes laziness and lack of innovation for these municipalities.

Another question was asked about the experience success at the Water Management unions of Turkey in some regions.

Dr. Murad replied that there are two types of unions, the first is purely service unions (water, electricity, and other services). The second is general unions that serve the municipality itself, for example, training, exchange of information, expertise, and coordination.

Water unions are few now due to the spread or expansion of the major municipalities system because the large municipality has the authority to manage water. In contrast, in the governorates that still have water unions, the unions have the same role, which is building and distributing water management station.

A question was asked about the Turkish experience, as it was successful in some period, and then it has changed; what is the role of political changes in this recent period, and did the last constitution contribute to protecting centralization and weakening the localities?

Dr. Murad replied that the constitution did not change much in Turkey with regard to municipalities; what changed was the strengthening of the presidential system and the enhancement of the central role. On the other hand, the legal framework for municipalities did not change constitutionally; what changed was the government approach to a new understanding of these constitutional texts.

A question was asked about the authorities of the municipality head and its impact on decisions in the municipality.

Dr. Murad replied that in the Turkish system, there are two important factors. The first is that the municipality head has authorities to have a (veto right) on the municipal council decisions in some cases. The Second that he is elected separately, which gives him special political leverage and a special position, and he feels that he has a different separate legitimacy from the council legitimacy.

- Third, most appointments are internal, as the council has a role in shaping policies in general in the Turkish system and differs from the system in other countries. In light of this system, a strong council can play a role, but the councils have not played a real role for political reasons.



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