

Iranian Library and Information Science Association (ILISA) in Service of Civil Society: A Pattern for Middle East Countries

Fariborz Khosravi

The president of Iranian Library and Information Science Association. Assistant Professor of the National Library and Archives of Iran, Tehran, Iran.

fa.khosravi@gmail.com

Saeedeh Akbari-Daryan

Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science of National Library and Archives of Iran. Tehran, Iran.

sakbaridaryan@gmail.com



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Abstract:

This paper attempts to discuss the history of Iranian Library and Information Science Association (ILISA) and focus on activities and policies relationship to civil society that highlights the values of libraries in Iran. These activities are presented in four sections as follows: 1) History of ILISA 2) The statutes, structure and strategic plan of ILISA 3) Extent of activities 4) Using technology to interact with the community. The authors try to present the history of the successful Association and highlight points related to solidarity with the civil society. It is hoped that interested Middle East countries can benefit from ILISA experiences.

During the last two decades of the ILISA's activities, the main focus was to improve the abilities and conditions of libraries thorough employment of local and indigenous people. In order to transmit ILISA's knowledge and experience to other countries, ILISA held courses for Afghan libraries with collaboration of National Library of Iran in Tehran and Kabul. The strategic plan of ILISA includes solutions to librarians' challenges in new digital world. This plan focuses on the sustainable development and wide scope of audiences. The main goal of annual Congresses of ILISA is on practical and executive strategies. The public libraries, Green information, Freedom of Information in citizen's right are among the subjects which are emphasis in the Congresses. Also, ILISA has held the open dialogues as the Journal Clubs and Gatherings that are explained in the paper.

Keywords: Iranian Library and Information Science Association (ILISA), Civil society, History, Activities, Iranian Library Science Association.

Introduction

The formation of civil society and institutions arising from it in the southern countries is associated with many ups and downs. The development of civil society requires two basic conditions: Lack of government control over private sector and the recognition of civil rights. Of course, in all countries, and especially in the Middle East, these two features have been many changes. In some of the countries in the region, women are not even allowed to participate in elections and drive and basically, there is no election in the country. But it should be noted that civil society should be shaped by the people themselves and should be growing and evolving and NGOs also can be considered as a symbol of civil society related to growing institutions. Look at the history of Iranian Library and Information Science Association (hereinafter referred to as ILISA) can confirm this issue.

In this study, after presenting the history of ILISA, the statutes, structure and strategic plan will be discussed. Then range of ILISA activities are discussed in detail, and in the next section, the use of technologies will be discussed in relation to society. Finally, some lessons that can be learned from ILISA during its lifetime will be expressed. It is hoped that ILISA experiences can be useful for other interested library science associations especially in countries in the Middle East.

1. History of ILISA

ILISA history can be divided into three periods:

1.1 First period: 1961-1963

The first attempts were made to form Iranian Library Science Association in 1961, which failed, and significant activity was not carried out. This period did not last more than a year and a half.

1.2 Second period: 1965-1978

In 1965, an attempt was repeated, and finally, a year later, the General Assembly was formed, and Iranian Library Science Association began to work. Two objectives were considered for this period: Encouraging Iranian Librarians to uphold the principles of library science, recognizing the importance of the library profession in Iran and raising the Iranian librarians position and protecting their rights. To achieve these goals, six committees were formed: Membership, Public Relations, Legal, Publishing and Education, Classification and Cataloguing Committees and Legislative Committee.

Over the years, these committees could conduct appropriate activities in Iran. Holding courses and workshops across Iran, publishing newsletters and the publication of several specialized books on the subject of library science. In 1968, the Association joined the IFLA and encouraged that many librarians participate in IFLA. The period was active until the Islamic Revolution of Iran (1978).

1.3 Third period: 1979

In 1979, after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a group of youths tried to make changes to the statutes of Iranian Library Science Association and re-started its activities that these efforts lasted by the end of 1980, but virtually in the same year, activities of the Association ended.

Practically until 1998, for 18 years, the library science in Iran didn't have any association, and its formation was emphasized at any meeting and congress. In 1998, with a focus on librarians of National Library of Iran, the first meeting of founding members was formed. Finally, Iranian Library Science Association was legally registered with the name "Iranian Library and Information Science Association ", and began its activities as an NGO from 2000, after twenty years of interruption.

2. The statutes, structure and strategic plan of ILISA

ILISA based its activities on two major documents, the statutes and strategic plan of ILISA.

In these two documents, the main aim of Association has been defined as promoting the professional status of library and information science in society, and providing the perfect platform for scientific and professional development of librarians in Iran.

2.1 Statutes of ILISA

ILISA statutes were approved in 1998 based on statutes mentioned; other macro objectives of the Association are as follows:

- Providing a perfect platform to promote knowledge of library and information science at the national level;
- Promoting the theoretical foundations of library and information science in order to create the appropriate infrastructure for educational and professional activities;
- Providing favorable facilities and environment for the development of closer and more comprehensive communication between all those involved in library and information science (librarians, faculty members and students);
- Attempts to create professional integrity in Iran;
- Making efforts in order to spread up the spirit of intellectual and practical contributions among members of the professional and social activities;
- Assist in the socialization process in library profession in order to communicate more objective and deeper relationship with the community and better understanding of community needs;
- Assist in the process of reviewing the functions of libraries and information centres in order to match the process to the new situation;
- Striving to consolidate activities of library profession and strengthening its position in the transitory situations due to the development of new technologies.

2.2 Organizational Structure of ILISA

Legal and personal members can join the Association. Personal individuals who have education or experiences determined in library science can become a member of the Association. Senior experts in library science are considered as associated and experts as affiliated members. The Association conducts its activities in form of following committees:

- Education Committee
- Research Committee
- Conference Committee
- Committee for Planning and Evaluation and Continuous Improvement
- Public Affairs Committee
- Membership Committee
- Marketing Committee
- Emerging Technology and Innovation Committee
- Publications Committee

ILISA organizational structure is shown in chart 1:

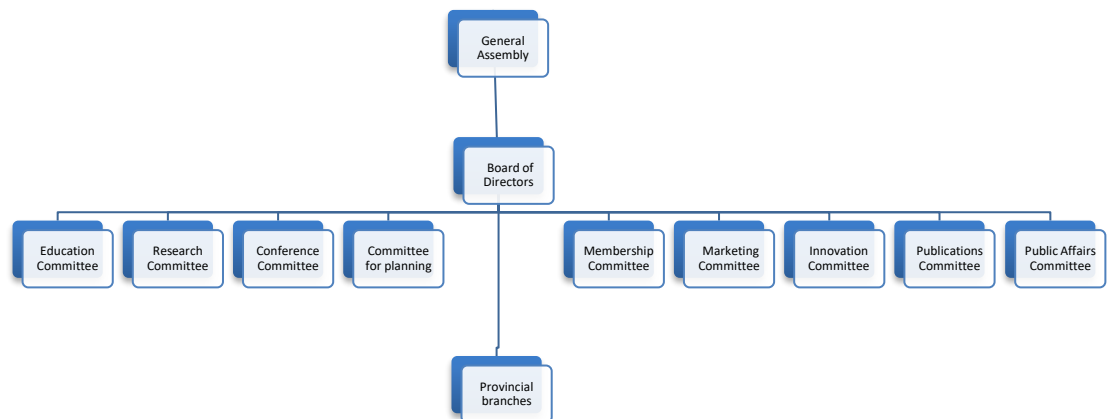


Chart 1- ILISA organizational structure

2.3 The strategic plan of ILISA

Strategic plan has been developed as an academic work under the supervision of two librarian professors, and has been approved by the Board of Directors ILISA. The strategic plan of ILISA includes solutions to librarians' challenges in new digital world. This plan focuses on the sustainable development and wide scope of audiences.

ILISA's strategic plan refers to points of civil society, e.g.: "...development and improvement of necessary infrastructures including libraries and information centres and promotion of information services in line with information society, promotion of literacy level, improving awareness and insight of people and improving their ability of them for active participation in achieving personal and social goals, and moving towards the consolidation of democracy and the freedom of speech..."

3. Extent of activities

It has been tried that, merely the Association activities don't focus on Tehran as the capital. During the last two decades of the ILISA's activities, the main focus was to improve the abilities and conditions of libraries thorough employment of local and indigenous people. This was done by establishing local branches of ILISA in ten provinces. Currently, branches of Khorasan, Fars, Mazandaran, Qom, Shiraz, Khuzestan, Azerbaijan, Kerman, Gilan, Hamedan are active.

The beginning of each year, an annual program is set up and implemented based on the strategic plan. During the year, Planning and Evaluation Committee is responsible for monitoring and control of the achievement of program objectives. Of course, all these activities should serve to promote knowledge and services in Iran. In order to acquaint the audience's, a summary of the performance of last year of Association will be presented.

3.1 Educational activities

During the past year, the Association has held 43 workshops across Iran. Some of the titles of the courses are as follows: According to research carried out in 2009, the Association has provided substantial training programs, and the Association has been successful in achieving their educational goals.

- Introducing information literacy skills
- Introduction to virtual social networks
- Introducing free access resources
- Web search skills
- Some practical tips on topics not thought in class
- The book role in life
- Learning Python Software: Natural language processing
- Introducing cataloguing of manuscripts
- Cataloguing and Classification
- Storytelling and writing
- Professional ethics for librarians
- Skills of scientific presentations at national and international level
- Scientific-research papers development practices pathology
- Communication and information skills
- Blogging
- Reviewing Scientific-research papers: Challenges, Methods and Solutions
- New steps in providing Library science services
- New approaches in academic library Services
- The maximum absorption methods in the library

- Introducing research capabilities of MORAE software
- Introduction to Information Security Tools
- Introduction to scientometric indicators
- Storytelling for children's librarians

It should be noted that most of these courses have been held by the Association branches in different provinces.

3.2 Research activities

Over the past year, four research projects are finished in collaboration with universities. For example, one of these projects entitled "Development of an appropriate model by Iranian Library and Information Science Association for evaluating libraries and information Centres based on European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)" has been done at the Kharazmi University.

More recently, a study entitled "Research priorities in the field of library science in Iran" was completed by the Research Committee. Publishing these titles help the master and PhD students to find the right theme, and also will conduct research towards subjects required.

Last year, This Association published three books and participated in the publication of a research-scientific Journal. The E-Journal of this Association has been released under the name "*Shenaseh*¹".

3.3 Surveillance activities

One of the Association plans is monitoring and supervision of the field of library and information science in Iran. Association has so far been able to assess Iran's library science schools. In national programs such as rural library contests or determining Book Capital, as a member of the judging panel can be participated. If necessary, the Association responds by issuing a statement or open letters about the current state of affairs. The last of these cases are as follows:

- Letters to the Cultural Commission of Islamic Parliament of Iran to protest the lack of funds approved for public libraries;
- Letter to the Minister of Science and Higher Education about the quality of higher education in universities in Iran.

3.4 Meetings and congresses

During the past year, the Association has held or participated in more than 15 congresses and conferences, one of the most important ones is Association's annual congress, which is held every year with more than 500 librarians across Iran. The Congress is formed annually with this aim, which passes from the cognitive realm, and tries to rely on skills and experiences. Formal form of the articles which is often derived from research in cognitive baseline levels can't be transformative. Librarians and archivists have a lot of unwritten experiences, yet Iranian oral tradition hasn't given them the chance to write. The Congress provides the

¹ <http://www.shenasehmag.ir/>

opportunity to do so, to provide the possibility of exchanging experience. Using approach so far, the two Congresses were held in the years 2016 and 2017. Panels that were held in last year, and the participants discussed in the panel, were as follows:

- Free access to information: From slogan to reality;
- The role of faculty in prosperity and promoting academic libraries;
- Organizing Knowledge: Challenges of Quality Improvement in organizing information;
- Public libraries: The development of library services;
- Quality management of information services: Library services standards in the electronic environment;
- Issues which students and graduates of library science encounter;
- Librarian employment issues: Professional activities and barriers;
- Technology and innovation: Study of Iran's content-centric businesses;
- Information literacy to promote self-empowerment;
- Archive and document centres: Archive and its problems;
- Librarians and libraries of Medical Sciences: The clinical librarian concept;
- Museums and relevant issues: Museums as information organizations centres;
- Children's libraries and school libraries: The role of the librarian in these centres;
- Green Information: Library, a source for environmental thinking
- Publishing issues: The challenges of the specialized publication of information science.

3.5 The commemoration of Iran's library science senior elites

One of the Association's activities is to hold commemoration ceremony for Iran's library science senior elites. This is done for several purposes: Evoking a sense of respect for elders in the community – introducing of the pioneers to the new generation, and the introduction of discipline in the academic community level. So far three awards have been proposed to three Iranian outstanding librarians. Three awards are given annually for topics assigned by ILISA. The subject of called for papers is related to the area in which the person under whose name ILISA determines the awards.

3.6 Cooperation with other institutions and experts

It has tried to provide facilities for cooperation with libraries and information centres, as well as experts at the national and international level. For example:

- Getting the librarians message such as Professor Boyd and Barbara Tillett for annual Congresses of ILISA;
- Communicate with Iranian professional librarians living abroad;
- Inviting the Dr. Nitin Kumar, safety expert in libraries and holding special meeting with him.

A few years ago, during a project with cooperation with the National Library of Iran, a special course was held for librarians in universities and public libraries in Afghanistan. The courses

were held with sending experts to Afghanistan and the presence of Afghans librarians in Iran and associated with positive results.

3.7 Journal Club Meetings

At these meetings, we can note to the latest developments and discussions in the subject areas, introducing of evaluation of published articles, and facilitating the formation of specialized research groups. The meetings will be held in different subject areas. To hold better these meetings, optimum practice manual has been developed by Research Committee. At each meeting, an English paper featured and a Persian article published arises. At the meeting, experts and attendees can express their views regarding any of the articles under supervision of the Chairman and according to the evaluation criteria. The first meeting was held in August 2016. These meetings will be broadcast live on radio.

- Research approaches in the field of information seeking behavior
- Research approaches in the field of human-computer interaction
- Research approaches in the field of information organization (RDA rules in the world and Iran)
- Research approaches in the area of information literacy
- Research approaches in the field of scientometrics
- Research approaches in the field of knowledge management
- Research approaches in the field of information retrieval

3.8 The Gatherings

Librarian event is a friendly, public gathering, with no preset topic, without an agenda and without speaker and the purpose of holding it monthly is to gather librarians, archivists, curators, bibliophiles and information science to meet each other, chat friendly, proposing ideas and views and learn as face to face.

4. Using technology to interact with the community

4.1. ILISA website

ILISA website² has tried to provide the required content for audience properly. In this regard, during 2015 and 2016 at the Iran Festival of Web and Mobile, it was awarded first place.

4.2. Webinars

ILISA using the webinar technique for education, yet holds educational webinars as follows:

- Innovation in Libraries

² <http://ilisa.ir/>

- Moving towards the future of academic libraries: a common information sharing atmosphere
- Identifying fake journals and low credit publications
- Big Data in Libraries
- Introducing the standards for preservation and maintenance in digital libraries
- How to increase visibility of your library in the virtual space?
- Oral History
- The use of social networks in libraries

Also, using this technique in the annual Congress held in 2017, the possibility to register for an online presence in Congress was provided.

4.3. Social networks

Due to the popularity and the growing use of social networks, especially telegram in Iran, ILISA has benefited from this technology. ILISA goal in the Telegram channel is stated as follows:

ILISA is a scientific association that is active in order to promote the professional status of library and information science in society, and provide the perfect platform for scientific and professional development of librarians and those involved in this field in Iran.

In this channel, news, reports and analyses to be shared.

Some Lessons that can be learned from ILISA during its life time

- Persistence and high motivation of initiators can lead to the continuation of Association.
- Engaging more young people in the activities and sub-committees leads to innovation and the continuation of activities.
- Trying to be close to academic centres where the library and information groups are active leads to continue the activities.
- Developing a strategic plan and annual plan and detailed monitoring programs adds to the richness of activities.
- Trying to participate by members, although insignificant would motivate members for greater participation.
- Due to the domestic problems of libraries and information centres raises community performance.
- Providing for the exchange of librarians experiences (such as the ILISA 's Annual Congress) reduces negative consequences.

Final words

Half a century of ILISA history has shown that the continuation of the activities of a professional association requires interest and love from its members. The Association has an important role in determining the position of library science and librarians in Iran. Since survival in today's world depends on the presence in the virtual space, we have decided to pay attention to enrichment the content of ILISA's website and utilizing a variety of social

networks more than ever, and maximize relationship with civil society utilizing modern capabilities.

We hope that the expression of activities and experiences of ILISA has managed to be useful for librarians interested in the activities of the Iranian librarians, as well as this article can open the way to establish more relationship between ILISA with other Library and information science associations in the world, especially countries in the Middle East.

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