

Chapter 16

Collaboration at an International Level: Germany

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ABSTRACT

Information is essential, and it accepts no boundaries. Librarians are importing and exporting information; they work globally. They are globally IT-connected; they are offering an extensive network staffed with specialists, and they know how to treat this network right. A Global Librarian is working within this network. This chapter discusses the information society, or the knowledge society. Librarians are global players within the knowledge society.

INTERNATIONAL TIES

Situated in the centre of Europe, the Federal Republic of Germany has a population of 81 Million people at 229 people per square kilometer, and covers an area of 357,111 km² in total. Its capital is Berlin. As a federal state, Germany is made up of sixteen Länder (federated states) surrounded by nine European neighbouring countries. For that reason alone it is perfectly natural for many of the 2000 member libraries represented by the German

Library Association to maintain international ties and relationships with countries in Europe and with all continents of the world.

The nature of these contacts is diverse. Library partnerships, joint projects, cooperation in international committees, integration and support of international colleagues during professional visits, and individual participation in international professional visits are evidence that many library workers in Germany know that their own work is enriched and improved through knowledge transfer, international training and study visits, best practice examples and ideas developed for library work in other countries.

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At the same time, the day-to-day demands and professional challenges for library staff are high and an international commitment is often considered additional effort or luxury on top of the actual job. Rarely is it a lack of interest or curiosity for new experiences that prevents people from participating in international exchanges or getting involved in international projects. The reason is rather that the financial expenses are not covered or that there is no room for additional international commitment due to the necessity to organize the day-to-day workload at reduced staff capacities.

KNB: EXPERTISE NETWORK FOR LIBRARIES – INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

At the Expertise Network for Libraries (Kompetenznetzwerk für Bibliotheken (KNB)) at the German Library Association (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband e.V.) there is a publicly funded staff position responsible for the management of international activities of German library staff.

The Expertise Network for Libraries is a publicly funded organization that coordinates in a decentralized form the national tasks of library services in Germany by assigning various fields of work to existing institutions such as the German Library Association. It began its operations on January 1st, 2004, and was established to secure essential services for the entire German library system without creating a costly additional infrastructure. The German Library Statistics, the online information service ‘Bibliotheksportal’ (Library Portal), a staff position for EU and third-party funding for libraries, and the benchmarking system BIX are also part of the range of services provided. All fields of work of the Expertise Network are characterized by their national significance, their continuity, i.e. they

are not limited-time projects, and their support of the cooperation of libraries.

The international cooperation position promotes innovation in the library field through knowledge transfer, and supports the international cooperation by coordinating the representation of the interests of libraries in a global context. This includes sharing current information on strategic development and topics on an international level with German colleagues, securing German participation in international committees, representing the interests of libraries in a global context, and coordinating the operations of the German IFLA National Committee. Its underlying principle is: international transfer of knowledge promotes innovation in libraries!

What are the specific issues significant for libraries? The topics library professionals frequently discuss internationally include digitization, e-publishing, copyright issues, access and support of information and education as well as strengthening the significance of libraries for the development of the information and knowledge society through lobbying. The challenges of a global knowledge society and growing worldwide networking require and enable international cooperation. More and more decisions with far-reaching consequences, even for libraries in Germany, are being made in international and European committees, e.g. the negotiations of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which can influence the services offered by libraries. An internationally active representation of interest is therefore essential. While it is coordinated and lead by the international library association IFLA, it needs to be supported on a national level also. For the benefit of library users and the sustainability of libraries, IFLA represents the interests of individual libraries and librarians on an international level. An individual librarian cannot fulfill this role.

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