

# Library Organization in Academic Libraries – Best-Practice Examples

## *(Bibliotheksorganisation in wissenschaftlichen Bibliotheken – Best-practice-Beispiele)*

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Thanks to an excellent organization of the [Goethe Institute in Belgrade](#) and the [National Library of Serbia](#) and with the generous help of the [Bibliothek & Information International](#) (BI-International) Serbian librarians had an opportunity to look into organizational surrounding of the German libraries and to discover recent developments towards new and better library services. As an academic librarian of the [Faculty of Stomatology](#) in Belgrade, I was particularly focused on discovering the German best practices that we could apply in order to optimize the performance of our library.

This study visit was organized for Serbian librarians from different libraries (national or academic). During our five-day tour we had an opportunity to look at the following libraries: [Berlin State Library](#) (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin; House 1 in Unter den Linden, House 2 in Potsdamer Straße), [Library of the Social Science Research Centre Berlin](#) (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, WZB), [Library of the German Bundestag](#), [Cooperative Library Network Berlin-Brandenburg KOBV](#) (Kooperativer Bibliotheksverbund Berlin-Brandenburg), [Philological Library of the Free University of Berlin](#) (Philologische Bibliothek der Freien Universität Berlin), [University Library of the Free University of Berlin](#) (Universitätsbibliothek der Freien Universität Berlin), the [Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm Centre of the Humboldt University of Berlin](#) (Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum, Universitätsbibliothek der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) and the [Philological Library of the Humboldt University of Berlin](#) (Philologische Bibliothek der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin). Besides Berlin libraries we also visited the [German National Library in Leipzig](#) (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek) and the [Saxon State and University Library in Dresden, SLUB](#) (Sächsische Landesbibliothek - Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden).

Technological and economic factors led to a notable change in the whole society, as did in information work. Growing and changing users' needs regarding new ways of accessing information, affected libraries to alter radically in several ways. Beyond changes in information technology two more main factors influenced the overall situation of academic libraries in Germany today. In the first place, the effects of the German reunification process had a great impact on the library system. Different classification systems, different types of libraries and library methods of those two very different states had to be even, and there was a need to compare their processes, develop strategies and find key performance indicators to see whether strategic goals are reached or strategy itself need to be changed. Furthermore, an ongoing process of the higher education reform and devoted serious and sustained efforts to improve international comparability of the German system resulted in a considerable amount of implemented measures, most of which have had a significant impact on libraries. Since the Serbian university system is also committed to adjusting its curricula, teaching environments, degrees and organizational structures to changed requirements, the Serbian academic libraries do with the very same influences that shape their working background. But the main noteworthy difference between those two countries is that Germany offers good and stable funding opportunities. The Germany's science budget has grown faster than those of most other countries in and outside Europe and it is complemented by European funding (Schiermeier, 2010).

During our stay we met with the various types of the German libraries regarding internal organization and their position within the whole system. Thus Humboldt University has an integrated system of one central library with very few departmental or branch libraries. The central university library is the main lending library open to everybody with open shelf storage and stacks. This, however, is not the case, for example, in the Free University of Berlin where faculty libraries have developed alongside the central university library. In Serbia also exists suchlike two-level system in which the central library as well as the faculty libraries are both fully independent. Therefore, in both Germany and Serbia there is currently a discussion on whether departmental libraries should be fully managed by the central library. One of the faculty libraries of the two-level system - *The Berlin Brain (Philological Library of the Free University of Berlin)*, in an attempt to organize processes and services in an effective way and according to general standards, actively implemented the merging of smaller libraries into larger units with better services.

Despite the heterogeneity of coordinating institutions and the lack of a unique central body, German academic libraries have been quite successful in establishing efficient services (Bunzel & Poll,

2002). Thanks to the high level of continuous funding over a long time period, various comprehensive collections of highly specialized scientific literature has been sustained in Germany. Fortunately there is a longstanding tradition of cooperative cataloguing, and even if regional centers apply various systems and data exchange is not always possible between them, the existing regional electronic union catalogues are integrated in [one virtual catalogue](#), accessible with one request only. Well developed nationwide access to library collections, as well as actualized digitalization process initiated a very successful document delivery service (SUBITO), which is accessible in many libraries today. In Serbia it is also very easy to obtain any article or book from libraries integrated in the SUBITO system. In order to adapt to new tasks and methods, many libraries in Germany have integrated acquisition and cataloguing procedures, that is the outsourced cataloging and processing services. The *Saxon State and University Library in Dresden* is one of the libraries that have already implemented a shelf-ready programme.

After reunification in 1990, the urgent need of restoring or rebuilding libraries in the eastern regions resulted in some impressive architectural creations. One such building project that we have visited is the *Saxon State and University Library in Dresden* with very attractive open access areas and reading room. However, for the last 18 years Berlin has been the biggest construction site where several remarkable new library buildings raised, for example *Library of the German Bundestag* and *Philological Library of the Free University of Berlin*. After all this visits it was impossible not to notice a very popular method of integrating old and new parts of buildings in order to create an attractive library. It was also obvious that German librarians have carefully developed regulations for library construction and they are very much involved in the planning of library buildings. The design of new library buildings accents an “open style” with light-weight modular construction and glass walls, demonstrating their value as a meeting-point and study space with plenty of room for communication.

All German libraries have implemented regular services for library readers, but the libraries our group looked into go even further to serve their customers. More intensive user-orientation approach is primarily demonstrated through longer opening hours (up to 24 hours). Researches of the *Library of the Social Science Research Centre Berlin* are allowed to use library collections even during the night. In order to improve their positions and services in accordance with university programs, academic libraries strive to provide broader study environments and group work areas as well as reading-rooms for mothers with children. Users of the *Saxon State and University Library in Dresden* can also enjoy in a wonderful grassy courtyard, perfect for stimulating conversations, studying or relaxing. Greatly changed user behavior has resulted in a broadening of reference and user education services of the libraries.

Many libraries have started to offer courses in how to use libraries and library catalogues, how to retrieve information from databases and how to evaluate the quality of Internet sources (Lux, 2003). Whether the libraries' teaching is in most cases not part of the formal academic curriculum, it is quite obvious now that the information literacy programmes will be institutionalized within the German education system.

Having analyzed those various German experiences, it is possible to identify some specific "best practices", that is a set of success factors critical for the future prospects of libraries.

- Firstly, the library products and services must be made visible through the whole institution. In order to be recognized and appreciated by its main users, libraries ought to establish the effective marketing and create its own professional image, perhaps like *Library of the German Bundestag* by promotional materials distributed to new users (in our case to new researches and teachers of the Faculty of Stomatology, Belgrade).
- After being visible in the setting it is crucial to become measurable, because good data for evaluation and planning is essential for good management. Measurement procedures should show what performance level is achieved, who uses the library and to what extent, and will provide clues to determination of key issues and needed improvements. Among other visited libraries, *Library of the Social Science Research Centre Berlin* and *Library of the German Bundestag* have well utilized the results of the surveys conducted on the regular basis.
- New task for the *Faculty of Stomatology Library* soon will be the administration and preservation of research data, which is already the common assignment of many libraries in Germany. Electronic books and full texts, publications from professors and university lecturers, classroom materials and conference papers, as well as doctoral thesis, are being collected and electronically archived on the servers of university libraries, mainly in open-access regime, which greatly increases the visibility of the institution.
- It would also be very useful to enhance "offensive" approach for meeting the user needs by offering new sources, building bibliographies on specific topics that might be of users' interest or conducting subject specific literature searches in advance. Library has to cooperate with other departments, to be able to anticipate users' pursuits, that is "to be able to act proactively rather than retrospectively" (Seidler-de Alwis & Fuhles-Ubach, 2010). Good example of such

performing we have seen in the *Library of the Social Science Research Centre Berlin* and *Library of the German Bundestag*.

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