

REPORT ON STUDY TOUR TO GERMANY
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I have had a great privilege and pleasure to be able to participate in a study tour to Germany, with the aim of visiting some prominent German libraries based in Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden, with the special emphasis on scientific libraries. The idea was to take a closer look "behind the scenes" and gain useful insight into the way these libraries are organized, in order for us to be able to transfer best practice examples into our home institutions, where possible.

The tour was actually a group visit, organized by Goethe Institute from Belgrade and under the financial support of BII (Bibliothek & Information International). It took place from 9th to 13th May 2011 and involved 9 colleagues from various Serbian libraries (National, University and specialized), Ms Bettina Radner from Belgrade Goethe Institute, and an interpreter.

In a very tight schedule, we were able to visit a total of nine libraries and one special information centre, which is not a library in a classical sense, but a cooperative online catalogue.

The institutions we visited were the following (in chronological order):

1. Berlin State Library = Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Unter den Linden)
2. Berlin State Library = Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Postdamer)
(Although this is actually the same institution, I have listed it separately because it is in two separate locations that differ both architecturally and in the way they work with the users)
3. Library of Scientific Centre for Social Studies = Wissenschaftszentrum Bibliothek
4. German National Library In Leipzig = Deutsche Nationalbibliothek Leipzig
5. State and University Library in Dresden = Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden
6. Library of German Parliament = Bibliothek des Deutschen Bundestags
7. Cooperative Library Network Berlin-Brandenburg = KOBV
8. Philological Library of Free University = Philologische Bibliothek der Freien Universität
9. University Library of Free University = Universitätsbibliothek der Freien Universität Berlin

10. University Library of Humboldt University, central library =
Universitätsbibliothek der Humboldt-Universität, Jacob- und Wilhelm-Grimm-
Zentrums

Although it was not originally in our itinerary, we were also able to visit the Branch Library of Foreign Languages and Literatures of Humboldt University, situated in August-Boeckh Haus, and take a look at its extensive Slavic collection.

The libraries we visited differ, obviously, in many respects; some are huge, hosting millions of volumes and employing hundreds of people, and some are relatively small. Some are open to general public, and some only to certain users. Some keep their material in open-access shelving, and some in storage rooms. Some are used free of charge, and some charge their services. Some are hundreds of years old, and others less than a decade.

All these varieties were, actually, very useful, for two reasons: firstly, we were able to experience first-hand the wealth and beauty of German cultural and scientific heritage, and secondly (and more importantly), each one of us was able to find at least one library that is in some aspect similar to our home institution and concentrate more on its specific features, thus facilitating “best-practice transfer”.

When preparing myself for this tour, I logically assumed that it would be one of the University libraries that would be most similar to mine. However, it turned out that we had more in common with smaller, specialized scientific libraries, primarily because of the sheer size of my home institution, but also in the way it organizes some of its functions. For example, although my library is open to general public, the core of our users is composed of university professors and students of Nis University. That influences not only our acquisition policy (which in times of economic crisis needs to be even more restrictive than usual), but also the way we advertise and market our services to our target groups. In that particular respect, I have found the Library of German Parliament to be most similar to the one I work in. Both of our libraries have a relatively specialized scope of users and both of us try very hard to be there for them, and make sure that our users know what services we are able to offer. Our marketing strategies are also remarkably similar (newsletters, surveys, e-mail alerts, printed and electronic bulletins, flyers, thematic exhibitions, bibliographical searches, workshops and seminars, telephone and personal consultations). What is different is that they devote much more time and energy to keeping statistical data on what had been done, because they justify their funding in that manner. Since our funding does not directly depend on the amount of services provided, we only do statistics for internal evaluation purposes.

This is not to say that I wasn't able to find similarities with other host institutions. Quite contrary, some of the libraries we visited gave me very useful ideas that I am about to discuss both with my colleagues and my management. For example, being a library dedicated primarily to students, we should consider adjusting our working hours or setting up group study rooms. Making library premises as a whole (and not just reading

rooms) more comfortable for student use, especially on a tight budget, is yet another option that will definitely be discussed.

Needless to say, there were numerous other interesting and/or useful ideas that I was able to gather during my study tour, from acquisition policy to the way library material is being stored and used. However, most of them will not be able to be implemented, either because of the funding restrictions, or due to the architectural limitations of the very building in which we are situated. But the very fact that I was able to gather those ideas and store them for possible future reference was of great importance for me, both personally and professionally.

Moreover, this study tour enabled me to meet some of my Serbian colleagues, exchange experiences with them and strengthen our cooperation.

Overall, I would classify my stay in Germany as both very useful and extremely pleasant. I am most grateful to BII for making this trip possible and I strongly recommend they keep up the good practice.