

Study Trip to Germany

1 December to 4 December 2013

On Sunday 1 December, twenty library directors and employees took off for the Ruhr District full of expectations to look at libraries and community centres. The overall purpose of the trip was to gain inspiration for new ways of designing and furnishing libraries and to take a look at “digital libraries” and the integration of digital materials in libraries. We also wanted to see examples of the integration of different cultural institutions under the same roof, hear about user participation and see examples of the involvement of volunteers in libraries.

During the planning of the trip we were surprised to see that many of the libraries we wanted to visit were closed on Mondays – in Denmark Monday is a very busy day for a library. Fortunately, for the libraries we visited on the Monday, the library directors were willing to receive us, so we got very good impression of the library buildings and their design, but not of how the libraries were used.

Program for the trip:

Sunday, 1 December

Dortmunder U, Zentrum für Kunst und Kreativitet

Monday, 2 December

Stadtbibliothek Essen

Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Dortmund

Tuesday, 3 December

Stadtbibliothek Münster

Stadtbibliothek am Neumarkt, Bielefeld

Wednesday, 4 December

Stadtbibliothek Bremen

A. P. Møller Skolen, Schleswig

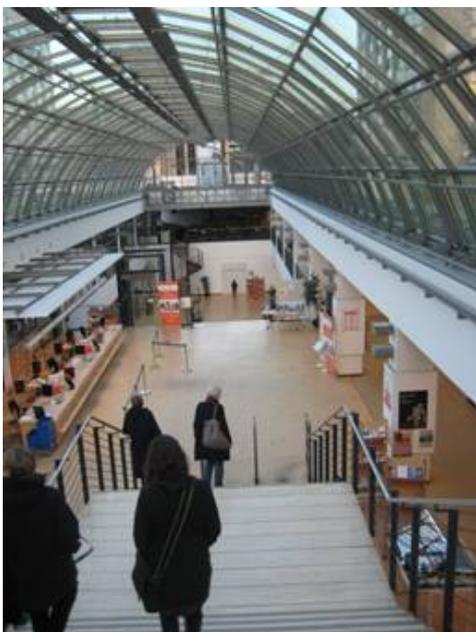
Dortmunder U

...was the first stop. They had arranged a guided tour for us and made sure that the participants heard all about the background of the community centre and saw the exciting design and layout of a community centre with many different functions. We saw many examples of how the architects had used the old building's features to create interesting and unexpected ways to make room for, for instance, displays and exhibits, like the large wall of “moving” pictures of children. We visited Dortmunder U in the late afternoon and had the sense that it might be difficult to create “life” and activities in the community centre when the

museums are closed. It is a very interesting building, with “light installations” on its windows and a fantastic view from the roof terrace.

Stadtbibliothek Essen

...has a very central location in a former swimming pool. From the entrance you get a spectacular view of the open staircase and the building’s three storeys, and because of the glass ceiling there is a lot of natural light, which also filters into the lending departments. For a building that was not intended to be a library, the layout and design of the lending departments with the different collections are optimal, even though they did not have the resources to replace their old furniture at the same time as the move to the new building.



Stadtbibliothek Essen



Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Dortmund

Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Dortmund

...has existed since 1907 and since 1999 it has been located in a beautiful building near the central train station. The library consists of the main library and 10 city branches. It owns approximately 1 million books, lends out 2.2 million items each year, has about 50,000 registered users and is visited by approximately 2,000 people each day. The library focuses on digital lending and the accessing of digital resources from home. It has 250 work stations and free Wi-Fi, which is unusual for the Ruhr District.

The library directors told us that the city of Dortmund (with 580,000 inhabitants) used to be known for mining, breweries and steel. Now both the mining and steel industries have closed down, approximately 12% of the population is unemployed and many people are moving away. This all affects the library, because the professional class, who are usually loyal library users, do not live there anymore.

Stadbücherei Münster

...is located in the city centre with the cathedral and the old library building as its closest neighbours. The new library was built in 1993 on a plot of land that had been empty since it was bombed in World War II. The building is an example of a very high calibre of architecture and it fits well into the surrounding area. A small alley runs through the building, and the two halves are joined together on the second floor. One half of the building is particularly beautiful – it is semicircular and designed like the inside of a ship with wooden bookcases along the arched wall and small windows in the bookcases like portholes.

The library's foyer has a cosy café, and by letting the paving outside continue into the building the town square atmosphere is brought in with it. Right next to the café is the newspaper reading room, which has a real fireplace. The library is very focused on promoting e-books, and there are tablets placed around the library, so that people can try out the different digital resources.

There are clear changes in design style when you go from one department to another, for instance, fiction is located in the calm atmosphere of "the ship". One drawback is the dreary basement with very few windows where the music and children's departments are located. Children's libraries do not have as high a priority as they do in Denmark. We were told that traditionally the Catholic Church has a collection of children's books, and therefore this has not been seen as a public concern.



Stadbücherei Münster



Stadtbibliothek am Neumarkt, Bielefeld

Stadtbibliothek am Neumarkt, Bielefeld

...is an impressive white building with large windows, which let a lot of light into this modern library. The entrance is located in the tall white tower, which decorates the façade and catches the eye when you arrive. The library was opened on 1 March 2012. A 3D map gives a good overview of this beautiful and newly designed library. The customer service counter is right at the entrance. When you enter the building and go up the grand staircase, which is almost iconic, you get a spectacular view of the library with all new furniture – they have spared no expense.

The furniture is all in nuances of grey, white, green, red and orange. Most bookcases are low and placed in dead straight rows, with one slanted shelf used to promote materials. The children's department is colourful in red and orange, and everything is within reach of the children. There is also room for the classic library, where we were met by nostalgia. There is an old catalogue cabinet and old leather-bound books placed on high shelves behind glass doors. In the music area, old LPs are kept behind glass, elsewhere there is a large globe, as tall as a grown man, and in the teen area the room is divided by eye-catching partitions, which allow teenagers to use the room in a more casual way.

The library has about 7,000 m² of space. There are approximately 170 seats and work spaces in different shapes and sizes for different age groups – of those about 70 have access to the internet. The library is open every day except Sunday.

The library uses volunteers for many activities, like book readings and services for the elderly and the handicapped. The library's four small branches are also manned by volunteers.

The library's motto is: *Lesen, lernen, leben* (reading, learning, living).



Stadtbibliothek am Neumarkt, Bielefeld



Stadtbibliothek Bremen

...was on our agenda for Wednesday morning, while it was closed to the public. The library is located in a building that used to be the police headquarters in Bremen, which has created a few design challenges. The many split-level storeys and small rooms have made it difficult to create a well-planned design. They have tried to compensate for these problems with signs and guidelines on the floors. Technologically speaking, the library in Bremen makes a wide range of digital resources available via its website, and it has hired a specialist to ensure the development of these digital materials.

A.P. Møllerskolen, Schleswig

...was the last stop on our trip. Architecturally, it is a very impressive building designed by Danish architect Henning Larsen. The school library is located in the centre of the building almost on an open platform, which connects the three storeys of the school. The library is for both the students and the teachers, and the central location emphasizes the library's significance for learning and for the Danish language.



A.P. Møllerskolen, Schleswig



The purpose of this study trip was fully met. At the same time we have to admit that compared to Germany, the funding for libraries in Denmark is quite good. In spite of that, we definitely returned to Denmark wiser and more inspired.