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## **Professional Visit to Libraries in Berlin: Impressions**

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Earlier this summer I visited a number of libraries and archives in Berlin. The libraries I chose for this visit offer a variety of ways to respond to the needs of collections and users that are relevant to our library, the Architecture & Planning Library, The University of Texas at Austin. Therefore, I focused on institutions with strong art and architecture collections, including archives and special collections, and libraries with building designs of particular note.

The list of libraries was compiled from my research and suggestions from several of our architecture faculty that come from Germany and from Dr. Ricarda Musser at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut who was also instrumental in setting many of the appointments.

Libraries visited:

- Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Unter den Linden & Potsdamer Straße
- Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut
- Kunstbibliothek
- Technische Universität Berlin: Bereichsbibliothek Architektur und Kunstwissenschaften
- Architekturmuseum der Technische Universität Berlin
- Senatsbibliothek Berlin
- Philologische Bibliothek at the Freie Universität
- Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- Universität der Künste Berlin
- Haus Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek

This document is not meant to be a descriptive summary of these libraries and archives; instead I will discuss the most salient discoveries I made during my visits.

The Architecture & Planning Library is housed in Battle Hall, the only academic building on our campus listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the first building designed to house the university library. As we approach Battle Hall's centenary in 2011, plans are underway to renovate and expand the building so I was very interested in visiting libraries undergoing renovations as well as new or recent library buildings.

The Philologische Bibliothek at the Freie Universität, designed by Foster and Partners is a spectacular building that brings together several small departmental libraries. The library is set in one of the green spaces in the building complex housing the humanities and social sciences and it is hard to believe that this library holds about 800,000 books and up to 650 users because its shape and footprint appear much smaller than they are. The interior is designed in such a way that light and open spaces are plentiful and the few colour elements are used to emphasize the access and focal points. Monika Diecks, head librarian, tells me that both staff and patrons really enjoy using this library. In fact, this is such a popular destination, particularly during final exams period, that sometimes they have to resort to limiting access to only students and faculty from relevant departments. Not only is the design of this building exceptionally advanced, this library is also setting new standards of service by being the first library at the university to open on weekends. This is particularly important since their collection is library use only.

Andrea Kullik, head of the art library at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, accompanied me during my site visit to the Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum, which will soon house the central university library. This new library designed by Max Dudler will replace 12 branches. This amalgamation will bring serious changes to the way many of the library staff work as services and collections are consolidated but are sure to increase efficiency and save money.

Volkswagen-Haus houses two libraries, the UdK library and the central library of the Technische Universität Berlin. This shared facility is another innovative solution to provide much needed library spaces to these two institutions. The logistics to handle both libraries are quite complex since most of their services and staff remain independent from each other. The two libraries share the service point on the main floor where they handle circulation services. Naturally, they also share the sorting and distribution system, but their collections and reference services are completely separate.

Berlin has always been a city that supports cutting edge architecture and these libraries are no exception. The projects are ambitious and innovative. The spaces are well thought out bringing new interpretations that integrate an understanding of traditional library spaces such as reading rooms and the need for new ways of collaborative working. There is a clear commitment to embracing new technologies and sustainable design including in the use of intelligent systems that provide natural –but controlled- ventilation and light.

One of the things that most stroke me was to learn about the variety of ways that libraries in Berlin are coping with the challenges that are the legacy of WWII, the division of Germany and the subsequent reunification. Many of their collections and facilities were affected during the war. I repeatedly heard that their collections were at least partly lost, sometimes due to fires but in many cases, the books were either hidden or dispersed and sent to other places such as Russia and Poland. To this day, many of the former holdings of Berlin's libraries have not been recuperated. Despite of this, I was able to see many treasures both new and old.

Most of the collections I saw during my visits were started hundreds of years ago and the institutions they belong to, have, in many cases, transformed, merged, divided and merged again. A particularly interesting example is the Universität der Künste Berlin. Dr. Uwe Meyer-Brunswick, deputy director of the UdK Library, conducted my tour and provided me with a time line that shows how several institutions evolved over the last 300 years, starting with the Akademie der Künste in 1696, to become today's UdK. This institution is rightly described as "the outcome of a history with bridges" and "both young and old"<sup>1</sup> since it has only existed as Universität der Künste since 2001.

A very interesting phenomenon in Berlin is the existence of pairs of similar institutions or "a library in two locations" that were created in DDR times to deal with the sudden gaps left by the division of Germany. An example of this is the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, which traces back its origin to 1661. With the Unter den Linden location under East German control, West Germany brought together other collections that eventually were housed at the Potsdamer Straße building designed by Hans Scharoun. Dr. Joachim Jaenecke took me around both branches and gave me an overview of the rich history of this library. He also explained some of logistics around the post-unification amalgamation of both libraries, as well as with the current renovations of the Unter den Linden building.

A second example of a pair of libraries is the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin. In this case, again, the original location, Haus Berliner, became part of East Berlin and a new central public library had to be created for West Berlin. Haus Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek was a gift of the American government. During my visit to this library Christian Wollert, art librarian, shared with me some of the issues they face. This building, designed by Fritz Bornemann and Willy Kreuer following the model of American public libraries, is now considered a historical site so modifications to the original layout, materials and furniture are severely restricted. Although to this day many of the design features, such as the stacks in the public area, are still functional and great examples of innovative ideas, the changes in technology and in the way a library functions makes it a challenge to create spaces that could better serve the needs of this library's users. A third library that was integrated to the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin in 2005 is the Senatsbibliothek Berlin. Jörg Fischer, library assistant at TU's Bereichsbibliothek Architektur und Kunstwissenschaften, suggested the Senatsbibliothek because of their focus on planning, one of my subject areas. When I visited Senatsbibliothek I was also impressed by their collection focusing on library design, which includes material specifications as well as documents from library projects around Germany. This is a great collection that is clearly meant to be used and is well used by professionals involved in new and renovation projects for libraries.

Other highlights of my visits were those to architectural archives, the Architekturmuseum and the archive at the Kunstbibliothek, which contains work

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<sup>1</sup> Universitätsgeschichte, Universität der Künste Berlin. [http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/content/themen/universitaet/universitaetsgeschichte/index\\_ger.html](http://www.udk-berlin.de/sites/content/themen/universitaet/universitaetsgeschichte/index_ger.html)

as early as the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. I was lucky enough to get a preview of the exhibition showcasing highlights of the museum's collection during my visit. Dr. Hans-Dieter Nägelke, director of the Architekturmuseum, also talked to me extensively about their digitization project: DFG-Projekt Digiplan, which entailed digitizing 105,000 drawings, prints and photographs from their collections. Thanks to this ambitious project, the vast majority of the materials of the museums are now accessible online via their catalogue which includes high quality images and metadata. The technical information that I received from Dr. Nägelke will prove invaluable as our library embarks on digitization programs for the holdings of the Alexander Architectural Archive, which is part of the library where I work.

At the Kunstbibliothek, I also worked on a collaborative project between them and UT Libraries with Petra Ruppert, head of acquisitions and exchange, and Dr. Joachim Brand, deputy director, and with my colleague Adán Benavides, librarian for research programs at the Benson Latin American Collection. The richness of the Kunstbibliothek collections is enviable and extends beyond books, encompassing also drawings, prints and photographs. During the time I spent closely looking at some of their collections, I discovered many valuable volumes in areas where most North American libraries naturally lack such as exhibition catalogues and other publications produced in Germany and Eastern European countries between the 30s and 70s. I was also struck by the high number of patrons in the reading room using their collections on a regular basis. The same can be said for the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut. These two libraries have internationally renowned highly specialized collections that continue to grow.

Although efforts are underway to increase cataloguing cooperation, all institutions I visited still do most cataloguing and classification in-house. This means that each library has their own classification system that is highly specific, as it has been developed to respond to the particular subject areas and user needs. Unfortunately, this also means that most subject or reference librarians spend a significant amount of time assigning subject headings or keywords to items that are to be added to their collection.

In contrast, in North America, aside from special libraries, the vast majority of libraries utilize the Library of Congress Subject Headings with most academic libraries using the Library of Congress Classification and most public ones using the Dewey Decimal Classification. This standardization allows libraries to share cataloguing records so it is quite rare for reference librarians to take any part in the cataloguing and classification of their materials. While many North American libraries might have started with in-house classification systems, or in the case of many academic libraries, with Dewey Decimal Classification, many of these libraries have gone through projects to convert all (or most) of their holdings to the current preferred systems so that their collections are easier to use. I suspect that projects of this nature, as well as those to transfer analogue records to electronic records, are much more challenging for libraries in Europe because these have existed longer than their American counterparts but I was told that there are many projects that have been completed with many more planned to

consolidate catalogues and increase collaborative cataloguing that will reduce the current duplication of labour.

Most librarians I talked to share the pressures we deal with at North American libraries with shrinking budgets and not always having the understanding of the role and importance of libraries by those in positions of power and by the public in general. It is clear that there is in the ever-increasing workload for all library staff as new services are added without adding more staff or even reducing it. Yet, it was my impression that the idea that "everything is in google" so prevalent in North America is slightly less of a problem as there is a longstanding tradition of using libraries and library users continue to appreciate the value of their rich heritage in print.

At the Haus Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek I also learnt about their Artothek, which provides a service that I am not aware exists in North America but I believe this to be an excellent one that shows the wide range of services that German libraries offer. Why not lend art, when libraries already lend books and audiovisual material? It seems like a logical step that I hope North American libraries will seriously consider adding.

The goal of my trip to Berlin was to learn about what German libraries are doing, to see their rich collections and facilities. The trip ended up offering much more than that by providing a glimpse also at the intricate history of libraries and German culture as a whole. Libraries, as part of culture, have evolved out in very different historical context compared to North America. Learning about the creation of institutions such as the Freie Universität that was initiated by students at the Humbolt Universität as a direct response to censorship and repression, and the reform projects for the latter, were important reminders of the values that we expect libraries to support. The degree of complexity, both in practical and philosophical terms, that these institutions have had to face are hard to fathom for me but certainly increase not only my interest in Germany but also my respect for this country.

In closing, I would like to thank all the librarians and other library staff that I met during my visits. They were extremely generous with their time and provided very interesting information. I would also like to acknowledge that this trip was made possible thanks to a grant from Bibliothek & Information International for professional visits to German libraries and a travel award from Karno Books, as well as the support of UT Libraries.