

Professional Visit Report: Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin and
Stadtbibliothek München

By Sarah Eagan
20.3.2023

At the beginning of 2023 I was granted financial support from BI-International for professional visits to Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin from 9th January to 10th January 2023 and Stadtbibliothek München from 30th January to 10th February 2023. As a Children's Librarian at the Brooklyn Public Library in New York City—the 5th largest library system in the country with 59 branches across Brooklyn—I was interested in exploring the similarities and differences in program planning, collection development and library culture between my experience and the experiences of Children's and Young Adult librarians in city libraries in Germany.

My journey started at the ZLB (Zentral und Landesbibliothek Berlin) where I had the opportunity in my short stay there to speak with many staff who worked in Children's and Youth program planning and collection development. I was impressed with the number of children's and young adult specialists that they had on their team and it led to a wide variety of quality programming being offered at the library. For the youngest library patrons there was Bücher Babies, a four-week program with parents and their babies, where each week had a new theme. The week I attended they were exploring books that made sounds. The children and adults got to spend time looking at board books with various elements like animal sounds, orchestras, and city sounds as the librarian explained the benefits of these sorts of books for babies development. This is similar to a program I facilitate at my library called Babies and Books, but I found the energy of this program and the focus on parents as well as babies to be an extremely important reminder that baby library programs must also be about providing parents and caregivers with early literacy tips. The week before I visited the theme for the week at Bücher Babies was parenting books. Since returning to my branch I have already incorporated some of these elements to my programs. We take things a lot slower now, allowing parents and caregivers to introduce themselves and their baby, giving them a chance to highlight a milestone the baby has recently reached or simply a new like or dislike their baby has discovered. Overall the experience inspired me to add more structure and information into why I do what I do in Baby and Toddler programs. Giving parents and caregivers more information on the early literacy reasoning behind the books and songs I choose for programs and the impact it has on kids has really improved the program.

At ZLB I also had the opportunity to learn from one of their librarians who focuses on programming for schools and school age children. They have a selection of offerings for school age children, and schools in the area can sign up to bring their class to these. These offerings include doing an age appropriate craft, storytelling and coding with Bee-Bots (an element I will touch on later), and for the older ages there are research workshops all about learning how to find resources and identify fake news. I found this system—with teachers having the option to sign up for these programs 1x/month—to be well organized and efficient. For those who are new to library there is also an element of these events where students can explore the library, hear what a public library does, and find books to check out. When students arrive they are given a paper and pencil and are sent off to explore the children's and young adult sections with the task of writing down 2-3 questions or observations they have about the library. I loved this idea and felt it could be a really fun element to add to my class visits. It is always interesting as a librarian to hear what elements stick out to new visitors and especially children who are coming for the first

time. It can give you the opportunity to explain why things are the way they are and how the library is organized. But it can also be the impetus for changing elements of your library space that maybe do not make sense anymore. Berlin and Brooklyn are similar in that there are many different languages spoken throughout the city and therefore in the library. To help provide accessibility to those students they also had key words like ‘hello’ and ‘welcome’ written in many key languages for these visits. The way this introductory library visit was set up—with this activity where students are exploring the library— could also be a really valuable tool to help all students feel welcome. Rather than speaking at the front of the room to all the students in one language, this activity allows them to access the library and feel included in whichever language they feel the most comfortable

In terms of the service hours of the library there were some interesting elements. For instance, the children’s section does not open until 1:00PM on Monday-Friday. The reason for this is partly because the library does not currently have a space for children’s programming (except for an outdoor Yurt for story time) and so this is a way to allow them the space to do their programs. There is currently a project in the works to add an addition to the library that would

provide space for programming for all ages. As it is now, the staff must move shelves around in the children’s section to set up programming. It seems a bit challenging to do this, and it also limits the browsing time and access to the space for patrons during the morning hours. But an amazing benefit is that, for instance, with the school visits and Bücher Babies the folks visiting the library have the space all to themselves. This allows the children and adults time explore the library and the staff can focus their attention for that time on the programs and program participants.

Some final elements of ZLB that I would like to highlight are the Mongolian Yurt that they have set up in their courtyard, here they have story

times for young children including Kamishibai storytelling. The yurt is used for special programming during the winter months and on their website it explains that the yurt creates a very special atmosphere for storytelling in which the art of storytelling works as a mediator between cultures. The Children’s and Youth Services section also has a recurring event where manga artists come and teach drawing to kids which has been extremely popular, they have workshops for kids that focus on biodiversity, climate change and sustainability and in the adult section patrons can borrow art and sculptures from the library. Overall I got the sense that staff spend a lot of time developing their programs. They have worked with pedagogy firms to make



Inside the Mongolian Yurt at the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek in Berlin. Berlin, Germany 2023.



Since 2008 during the winter months ZLB has had this Mongolian yurt in their garden for special events. Berlin, Germany 2023.

these programs interesting and developmentally appropriate for kids and I am inspired to add this



“Kunstwerke leihen wie Bücher”. Patrons at ZLB can check out sculptures for their homes! Berlin, Germany 2023.



A selection of paintings, drawings and photography that patrons can select from and check out from ZLB. Berlin, Germany 2023.

energy to my work at the library.

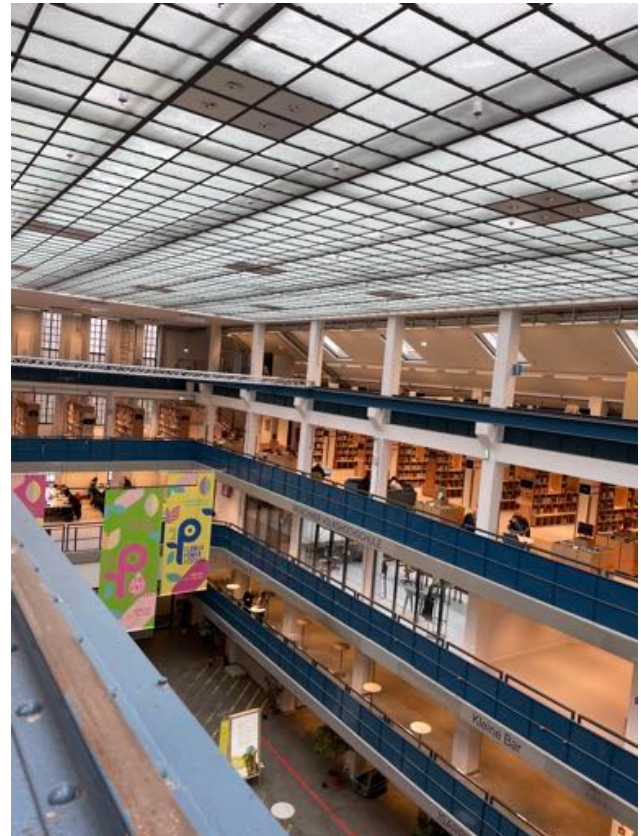
During my visit to the Munich Library system I had the opportunity to visit many different branch libraries. My base library was Motorama, which is one of the City Library’s libraries main branches, but I also observed programs and got tours of the collections at Bogenhausen, HP8, Isarvorstadt, Fürstenried, Internationale Jugendbibliothek (International Youth Library) and Monacensia im Hildebrandhaus. Originally, the headquarters of the City Library was located in the Gasteig since it opened its doors in 1985. However, due to renovations of the arts centre in Rosenheimer Straße, the Munich City Library opened two new locations—the Gasteig Motorama and the Gasteig HP8. Gasteig Motorama opened in November 2021 in a shopping center opposite the Gasteig arts centre in Haidhausen with a focus on family, gaming and digital learning and Gasteig HP8 opened in an industrial building with a focus on Music.

Although they are temporary locations, both Motorama and HP8 have beautiful and welcoming spaces. Motorama has a large space for children where I got to see a presentation on the *Gruffalo*, participate in a school visit for children (as part of the ‘Lesestart’ program) and present an English story time to a bilingual kindergarten with the stage like device used for Kamishibai storytelling. The children’s books at Motorama (and in all of the Munich city libraries) were organized by genres like “Adventure”, “Chaos and Catastrophe”, “Fantasy” and

“Classic” which I found really interesting and seems to work great for in person browsing. There has been a lot of discussion in the United States concerning cataloging and library organization so I was excited to see genres being used here! Many school libraries in the U.S. have begun to “ditch dewey” (the dewey decimal system) because they feel it is not intuitive for young kids when they are searching for books. Unfortunately, it is a hard transition for public libraries, especially large systems with a lot of media because there is a lot of exchange between branches and an overhaul like that would take a lot of work. While BPL has not made this switch, a lot of libraries that have switched to organizing children’s books by genres have seen an increase in circulation.¹

Gasteig HP8 was an interesting space and to me highlighted the ways that public libraries can be integrated with other cultural institutions. It is located in the same building as the philharmonic, and you can see in the photo that it is an industrial building with lots of open space. The bottom floor is the lobby for the philharmonic, and on the day I was visiting there was an opening night presentation for the Flower Power festival, a nine month long festival in Munich celebrating nature and art. Because the library is so open, music could be heard throughout the building as musicians prepped for the night. As with many public library features, this was a happy surprise for some visitors and a frustration for others. The branch’s focus was on music, language and lifelong learning and you could see and feel that in the collection and program spaces. There are electric pianos where patrons can practice using headphones, a MusikLab where musicians can record themselves, and various workspaces at desks or in lounge chairs. One of the most interesting pieces was that both branches (Motorama and HP8) operate as open libraries, meaning they are open to the public every day from 7AM-11PM. The service hours start later and end earlier, but during the extra time the public is free to use the space to meet, study, read, work and browse. The current vision for the future of the Brooklyn Public Library is to be a “vital center of knowledge for all, accessible 24 hours a day” so it was really great to see something similar in action in Germany.

At both ZLB and the Munich City Library I heard about the programable robot for kids called Bee-Bots. I was able to see them in action at the Isarvorstadt branch library! The Bee-Bots were easy to use and quite a hit with the children who came to this drop in program. Kids around



A view of Gasteig HP8 located in a former transformer hall on Hans-Preißinger-Straße in Sendling. Munich, Germany 2023.

¹ Witteveen, April. "Ditching Dewey? These Ideas Can Get You Started on Genrefication." *School Library Journal*, 25 Sept. 2019, www.slj.com/story/ditching-dewey-libraries-These-Ideas-Can-Get-You-Started-on-Genrefication. Accessed 10 Mar. 2023.

ages 5 and up were able to use the Bee-Bots themselves and by using the arrows on top of the bee and the GO button, they were able to send the robot on different missions. The mats on the floor were filled with pictures and children would try to get the robot to go where they wanted it to go. I loved that even the younger children who were fascinated by the program were able to participate with the help of a grown up. There are so many options to do programming with the Bee-Bots and it was a great introduction to coding for kids! As I mentioned earlier, the staff at the ZLB also use Bee-Bots and with older children they incorporate the Bee-Bots into storytelling activities. The program starts by reading a story and identifying the key parts of it, such as characters, setting and plot. Then, using arts and crafts, kids set the scene and make characters/costumes that will fit on the robots. Lastly, they program the Bee-Bot to move through the story the way they are trying to tell it and then they watch as the characters move through the plot. I loved hearing about this mix of science, art and storytelling and I think Bee-Bots or something like it would be a worthy addition to my library system.



Bee-Bots—programable robots that introduce kids to coding—being used at a program at the Isarvorstadt branch library. Munich, Germany 2023.

Another fascinating and culturally important part of the Munich City Library system is the Monacensia in Hildebrandhaus. The library serves as a literary archive and research library, and has both permanent and rotating exhibitions that are free to the public. The collection was begun in the 1920s and since 1977 it has been housed in a mansion, known as the *Hildebrandhaus*, which was originally designed by the German sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand. While I was there I got to see the permanent exhibitions— ‘Literarisches München zur Zeit von Thomas Mann’ which displayed photos, letters and artifacts from famous German

literary figures including Thomas Mann, Erika Mann and Oskar Maria Graff and 'Das Hildebrandhaus – Biografie einer Künstlervilla' which explains the history of the mansion. The current exhibition was titled “Frei leben! Die Frauen der Boheme 1890–1920” and explored the history of the Bohemian movement in Munich in the 1900s and the ways women began to lead free lives here as artist or writers. The exhibition focused on: Franziska zu Reventlow, Margarete Beutler and Emmy Hennings and the exhibitions seemed to be a great draw to encourage the public to visit the library. The focus of the libraries’ collection is on literary works from authors who are from Munich or write about Munich. It was a wonderful space and I got to speak with the archivist and learn about the vast collection there.



Excerpt from the “Frei leben! Die Frauen der Boheme 1890–1920” exhibition at the Monacensia im Hildebrandhaus. Munich, Germany 2023

Though not part of the Munich City Library system, I also had the opportunity to visit the Internationale Jugendbibliothek with Dr. Leila (Roya) Maktabi Fard, a librarian at the Munich City Library and also a freelancer in the Persian Language section at the Internationale Jugendbibliothek. The Internationale Jugendbibliothek is the world's largest library for international children's and youth literature. There is a children's library, a reference library, exhibition spaces, workshops for school children, a yearly book festival and book catalogue (White Ravens), and a fellowship program for children's and young adult literature scholars. It was truly an inspiring space that focuses on the importance of children's and young adult literature and celebrates the authors and illustrators that have made an impact on children's literature around the world.



Photo with the *Gruffalo* as part of the current Axel Scheffler exhibition "Picture Worlds for Big and Small" at the Internationale Jugendbibliothek Munich, Germany 2023



The Children's Library at the Internationale Jugendbibliothek which contains 30,000 books in over 20 different languages, all of which can be lent out free of charge. Munich, Germany, 2023

On my final day at the Munich City Library I got to give a presentation in German about my work as a Children's Librarian at the Brooklyn Public Library! I highlighted past programs I have done and explained some differences I noticed between the library systems in Germany and the the United States. One main difference I noticed was the cost of becoming a library member in Germany. In Munich the library cards cost 20€ for adults per year and 10€ for children. In Berlin the library cards were 10€ for patrons over the age of 18. In Berlin there was also a fee for sending books from one library in Berlin to another and both libraries charged fees for returning books late. In the U.S., it is free to get a public library card where you live. Additionally, many library systems (including BPL) in the past three years have begun to back away from charging late fees.² In 2019, NPR reported that for decades "libraries have relied on fines to discourage patrons from returning books late" however, "a growing number of some of the country's biggest public library systems are ditching overdue fees after finding that the penalties drive away the people who stand to benefit the most from free library resources." (Bowman, 6). Earlier that year, the American Library Association passed a resolution where it recognized fines as a form of social inequality and called

on libraries nationwide to eliminate their fines.(Bowman, 8). There are many ways in which the United States as a country needs to work on economic inequality and providing social safety nets

² Bowman, Emma . "'We Wanted Our Patrons Back' — Public Libraries Scrap Late Fines To Alleviate Inequity." *NPR*, 30 Nov. 2019, www.npr.org/2019/11/30/781374759/we-wanted-our-patrons-back-public-libraries-scrap-late-fines-to-alleviate-inequi. Accessed 10 Mar. 2023.

the way that countries like Germany do. I was surprised to find this difference in library access and am curious to explore why that difference might exist.

Overall, I had an amazing and inspiring experience getting to visit these libraries in Germany. I found the work culture at both library systems very refreshing. There was a lot of focus on meetings, program planning and professional exchange. The team of children's specialists at both library systems and the ways they communicated with each other and researched their work was a great reminder at how vital it is to take time to develop ideas and explore new programs. It is also affirming to see libraries from different countries caring about the same things: access to resources, love of books and stories, and exchange of ideas. I feel lucky to have gotten to experience this and work on my German along the way.

Text and Photos by Sarah Eagan