

Interview for Latvian Library Portal [www.biblioteka.lv](http://www.biblioteka.lv)

**Can you briefly describe your role as president of Bibliothek & Information Deutschland (BID) and your path into the library field?**

Bibliothek und Information Deutschland (BID) is the umbrella organization of the institutional and professional associations of German librarianship. As president, I moderate internal exchanges and represent the library associations' common interests externally. But to be honest, I've only been in charge for a few weeks and I'm still learning about my tasks every day.

My path into the library world was winding and full of beautiful forks in the road. It would take too long to explain, but it was serendipitous to end up in the library field.

**What are some of BID's current key initiatives or focus areas?**

As an umbrella organization, BID does not have its own agenda; rather, it supports its members' joint initiatives. For example, this includes the series of events on professional ethics that has been running for two years.

Recently, BID and its members took a clear stance on the dismissal of Dr. Carla Hayden, the Director of the Library of Congress.

Through its working group BII (Bibliothek Information International), BID promotes international exchange through specialist scholarships. Currently, the focus is on Latvia, but BII also supports librarian visits and conference participation from other countries.

A highlight every year is the awarding of the Karl Preusker Medal, one of the highest honors in the German library system. Since 1996, it has been awarded to individuals and institutions that have made a special contribution to the library and information system. This year's winner will be revealed soon!

**Latvia and Germany have recently begun a long-term (2025-2028) collaboration in the library sector. What kind of projects or exchanges do you envision between Latvian and German libraries?**

In our country partnership, the most important thing is what our colleagues in Latvia and Germany have in mind. It's about meeting at a working level, learning from each other and being curious about the other country, its libraries and culture.

At our kick-off workshop, dozens of ideas were collected: These ideas range from joint projects and exchanges about similar challenges, such as funding cuts or information literacy, to joint lectures for Latvian and German students to activities for library users, such as Zoom book clubs.

In addition to the collaboration between associations and large libraries, I am looking forward to the exchange between smaller libraries, such as school, hospital and public libraries, as well as government libraries.

**How do you see this collaboration benefiting both countries' library communities and users?**

We all focus on the needs of our users, the communities and society. Despite our differences, we have a lot in common: Pupils, students and scientists need optimal support and easy access to information. Regardless of income, all citizens of a community must have access to secure information and a place to meet and exchange ideas. Together with

museums and archives, libraries form the memory of the history of a country or a city. And everywhere we see the dangers of disinformation and attacks on democracy, and, despite limited financial resources, we must not only maintain our range of media and services but also develop them in line with the times. If we librarians learn from each other and allow ourselves to be inspired, library users will benefit directly. This could be through new services, a different library interior design or by sharing successful public relations or lobbying ideas.

Even if we only gain new motivation from exciting encounters, it would benefit us, our libraries and their users. I firmly believe that work should be enjoyable. In fact, I think it has to be enjoyable to be good.

### **What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing libraries in Europe today?**

First and foremost: disinformation. It is shocking how quickly social media, fast online portals and AI-generated content spread half-truths, deliberate deceptions and profound falsifications and how poor the ability to evaluate content is. Additionally, traditional media are partially discredited, at least in Germany. Libraries can play an important role in strengthening media and information literacy also by cooperating with educational institutions to help students and researchers critically evaluate sources, understand research ethics and address privacy issues - this is more important than ever.

Academic libraries are playing an increasingly important role as partners in science. They are no longer just information repositories; they are also active supporters of research data services, publication support and scientific communication infrastructure.

Expanding science-related services is becoming increasingly important for academic libraries. Libraries are becoming active partners in the research and publication processes. By offering services such as data management, support for open-access publications, analysis of research results and advice on open science, libraries strengthen their role in the academic world and can also support citizen science projects.

Libraries also help make the opportunities and risks of AI transparent. Paper mills and predatory journals were just the beginning. Academic publishing will continue to change, and libraries will guide scientists through the changes.

### **How are libraries in Germany approaching digital transformation or the role of AI in the library field?**

We experiment, learn and encourage each other and library users to explore digital possibilities while being mindful of the risks. In recent years, lectures on AI have been omnipresent at library conferences, and various formats have been developed for library work. For example, public libraries offer workshops on AI for the curious, as well as support for using digital services in daily life for those who still feel unsure and overwhelmed. University libraries offer tutorials and courses for students and faculty on using AI throughout the research cycle — from literature searches to text indexing and revision.

### **Are there innovative practices in German libraries that you think could inspire Latvian libraries - and vice versa?**

I am sure that both sides will inspire each other! The next three years will reveal the outcome.

I suppose that Latvian libraries play an exceptional role in shaping and preserving cultural and national identity due to the many, sometimes violent, breaks in history. They preserve

language, literature and history and make them tangible. I would like to find out more about this. And I am curious to see what the Latvian view of the German library system discloses.

**In your view, what role do libraries play in fostering democratic values and social cohesion?**

These are the fundamental principles of our work! Libraries provide access to information for everyone, regardless of their status or income. They provide spaces for interaction and connection. Libraries must be bulwarks against all efforts to weaken democracy. Unhindered access to information and the opportunity to engage with opposing arguments are essential in order to form an informed opinion that can withstand discourse.

**How can libraries remain essential community hubs in the 21st century?**

I am quite confident about that. People are naturally inclined to learn, discover and exchange ideas. By designing spaces that are appealing to users, offering generous opening hours and engaging the community in how the library can be utilized, libraries can maintain their central role in the community.

People visit libraries for specific reasons, such as to find literature, conduct research or access work opportunities. But these places are also characterized by their safety, accessibility and inclusivity, welcoming individuals and groups without any associated costs. Libraries are places of encounter. Despite the absence of empirical evidence, it is my conviction that libraries even offer substantial benefits to our well-being. A place that is characterized by peace and thoughtfulness must have a positive effect, right?

**What led you to pursue a career in the library field?**

I studied linguistics, German literature and sociology. Early on, I realized that I was fascinated by how people use language and media differently, their motivations and how they derive pleasure or profit from books, magazines and other media. After many years working in other sectors, I came across an advertisement for a traineeship in the higher library service and decided to try my luck. And found a wonderful, versatile profession.

**What inspires you most in your work with libraries?**

The people in libraries are inspiring. I have never found so much enthusiasm in any other sector. The joy with which services are developed, projects are carried out and standard tasks are handled in a professional and focused manner is infectious. No matter how big or small the library is, librarians are open-minded and enthusiastic.

**Do you have a favorite library or reading memory you'd like to share?**

Sometimes on Sundays I go to the America Memorial Library (AGB) in Berlin-Kreuzberg, one of the two locations of the Berlin Central and Regional Library. Then I see a library filled to the last seat, lots of young people who have arranged to meet up to study and chat. But also families having a good time in the children's library and adults who are working alone or have come to one of the many events. There are reading groups, doodling workshops and even laughter yoga. Seeing all these people in the library - on a Sunday! - is very touching and makes me feel optimistic. In these moments, I am sure that our society is resilient and that everything will be fine.

**How do you see the role of international cooperation in the future of libraries?**

International cooperation is essential. Issues such as copyright, sustainability and the promotion of democracy are global issues. Networking strengthens our ability to lobby for libraries and supports innovation. Perhaps international cooperation is more established for academic and special libraries because science is structured internationally. However, public libraries will also benefit from networking and exchange.

**Is there a message you would like to share with Latvian library professionals and readers of the Latvian Library Portal?**

Thank you very much for getting involved in our partnership! Our project is an incredible opportunity to discover not just another library system, but also another country with its rich history and vibrant literature. I'm really looking forward to it.

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