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Travel Report: Study Visit to Berlin Libraries



This report summarizes the study visit conducted by two representatives of the Library of Alexandria, Ms. Hend Elshennawy and Ms. Marwa Elgharabawy, to the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Berlin State Library) and the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin (ZLB – Central and State Library of Berlin) from 4 October 2025 to 17 October 2025. The visit was partially funded by the BI International Organization. We are very grateful to BI International organization for supporting our trip and attendance, and thankful to the host librarians for their concern and kind hospitality. It was really a valuable and rewarding experience.

Participants

- Hend El-Shennawy – Head of Quality and Administrative Services, Library of Alexandria. Specialization: Standardization of workflows, development of KPIs for assessing service quality, and implementation of quality management frameworks.
- Marwa El-Gharabawy – Head of Specialized Libraries, Library of Alexandria. Responsible for the Children's Library, Young People's Library, Taha Hussein Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and programs for people with special needs.

Purpose of the Visit

The visit aimed to exchange best practices and gain firsthand insight into the quality assurance systems, inclusive services, and management processes at Berlin's major libraries. The focus was on understanding how these institutions design, implement, and evaluate service quality and accessibility, with the goal of benchmarking them against the Library of Alexandria's current services. Also to gain insights of their work processes in the specialized libraries, the services they provide and the collection development.

Bibliotheca Alexandrina – Overview of Services

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) is not only a library but a comprehensive knowledge hub that includes museums, exhibitions, and research centers. It comprises the Main Library and six specialized libraries: the Arts & Multimedia Library, the Taha Hussein Library for the Visually Impaired, the Children's Library, the Young People's Library, the Exchange & Archive Section, and the Rare Books Section. The BA offers access to millions of books, digital resources, and global databases. It also supports regional cooperation through services like the BA Information for Africa (BAIFA) network, promoting knowledge exchange across the continent.

1. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Berlin State Library)

The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (SBB) is one of Europe's largest research libraries, with branches at Unter den Linden and Potsdamer Straße. The visit focused on understanding its quality assurance processes, inclusion strategies, and departmental workflows.

Key contacts:

- Carolin Hahn – General Directorate (Visit Coordinator)
- Belinda Jopp – Head of Inclusion Office (Stabsstelle Inklusion)
- Barbara Bossert – Project and Process Management (Stabsstelle Projektmanagement)
- Pia Beckmann – Public Relations (ÖA)
- Dr. Markus Heinz – Maps department
- Dr. Christoph Rauch – Head of the Orient department
- Dr. Sebastian Schmideler – Head of the Children and Young People department
- Dr. Gabriele Leschke – Magazines, Cataloguing Services and Inclusion program
- Dr. Verena Feistauer – Inventory and Quality Management
- Dr. Wiebke Rössig – Program Coordinator

- Frau Sarah Wildeisen – Children and Youth Library



With Prof. Dr. Achim Bonte
Director General of Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin
Presenting a copy of the book “Bibliotheca Alexandrina: Not Just a Library” – to the director of the Berlin State Library.



Departments Visited and Work Processes

- Public Relations and Press, Frau Pia Beckmann; responsible for the website and all press related issues as well as the external communication with press organizations and internally coordinates this within the library. Serves as a centralized department for communication, press and social media. What was interesting was the developing of

guidelines for communication and social media releases, which abides with our focus of quality assurance, tools, frameworks and guidelines to ensure standardization and continuing development of library services.



- Library Services Department (Benutzungsabteilung): Oversees general holdings, reading room services, and interlibrary loans. The department also manages user training and events aimed at improving research literacy and engagement. Their work processes are highly structured, with clear workflows from acquisition to delivery, supported by performance indicators and user feedback systems. Focused on the Inclusion Office (Stabsstelle Inklusion): Led by Belinda Jopp, this office develops and monitors accessibility measures for users with diverse needs. It ensures the physical environment, digital resources, and public events are inclusive. The office also runs staff training programs and maintains a public reporting system for accessibility issues.



Presentation about Bibliotheca Alexandrina

- Map Department (Kartenabteilung), Dr. Markus Heinz: Presented their cataloging and documentation systems (IKAR, KartDok), which standardize metadata for geographical materials. These systems represent a high level of data accuracy and cataloging consistency, serving as a benchmark for digital archiving practices. The map library is 150 years old with over 1 million maps in their collection. The Map department has always been regarded as Germany's centre for cartographic holdings. It collects maps, atlases, views, and specialist literature from every country and in every language.



Holdings as of September 01/2021:

- 1,200,000 map sheets (among these are 30,000 manuscript maps)
- 250,000 digitised map sheets
- 2,900 CD-ROMs
- 36,000 atlases
- 155,000 views
- 38,000 books on cartography
- 800 globes

On behalf of the [Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft \(DFG\)](#) the Map Department of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin hosts the [Specialised Information Service Cartography and Geodata](#) as well as the period 1701-1912 for maps and views of the [Sammlung Deutscher Drucke](#).

Furthermore it holds the map collection and library of the [Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin](#), which are on permanent loan, and it is also the depot library of the [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Kartographie](#).

The foci of the collection reflect the department's functions and the history of collection growth. Topographic maps of different scales and types from every country of the world are collected and listed in the separate database [Topo-List](#).

The department acquires literature on cartography: relevant publications, journals, collections of articles, or exhibition catalogues covering all pertinent subject areas. The material which is international in scope is also catalogued and classified in the

The library has a remarkable map digitized collection. The following are their online resources and they are all open access(especially the Topo List):

[StabiKat](#) Modern maps & cartographic literature
[StaBiKat Classic](#) Modern maps & cartographic literature
[IKAR-Old maps database](#) Pre-1850 printed maps
[Topo List](#) List of topographic map series
[KartDok](#) Cartography repository
[Bibliographia Cartographica](#) Cartographic literature incl. articles
[Bibliographia Cartographica](#) List of online publications
[Berlin Views](#) Bibliography of topographic views of Berlin
[ZDB](#) Journals of cartographic relevance
[ZDB](#) List of journals of the former special subject collection of cartographic literature
[EZB](#) E-Journals of cartographic relevance
[DBIS](#) Databases of cartographic relevance
[CD- / DVD-ROMs](#) of the map department listed in the Stabika

- Oriental Department (Orientabteilung), Dr. Christoph Rauch: Facilitates research on Arabic and Middle Eastern resources, providing an opportunity for discussion on the Arab publishing sector and digital preservation strategies. When the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm founded the library in 1661, Oriental manuscripts and prints were already part of the initial collection. The Oriental Department was established as an independent department in 1919. It systematically acquires print and electronic resources from and on the following regions: the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and Africa. In addition, the Oriental Department is responsible for the fields of Judaism and Eastern Christianity.

Consisting of 42,000 manuscripts and block prints, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (SBB) holds the largest collection of Asia's and Africa's written cultural heritage in the German-speaking area. The holdings are further enhanced by 40,000 text fragments from the Silk Route (Turfan Collection) which BBAW deposited with SBB. The collections are supplemented by a large number of manuscript reproductions, including 180,000 filmed manuscripts from Nepal that are particularly noteworthy.

The Oriental department is the key research partner for International Islamic and Arabic Studies. In cooperation with project partners, the DFG-project "Orient-Digital" develops the Oriental manuscript portal ["Qalamos: Connecting Manuscript Traditions."](#)

Potential cooperation with the oriental department is thought of especially regarding the manuscript portal Qalamos. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina holds a very special manuscripts collection which can be integrated within the portal for further referral to the Library of Alexandria's website.

- Children's and Youth Book Department: Manages children's collections and cultural heritage materials, including exhibits like the 'Egyptian Struwwelpeter'. The department balances preservation and user access through targeted educational programming. Its collection features both historical and contemporary children's and youth literature from around the world offering controlled access for research purposes.

- **Project and Process Management Office (Barbara Bossert):** Responsible for workflow optimization, inter-departmental coordination, and KPI-driven evaluations. This unit sets standards for efficiency and transparency, integral to the library's quality management framework. The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz carries out a large number of projects. Improved accessibility and usability of scientifically relevant materials, the development of technical tools and the establishment of research platforms are at the forefront - usually with external partners and always in close coordination with the using communities.

About 60 percent of all projects carried out in the library are funded by third-party donors, such as the German Research Foundation, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the European Union and private foundations. This means that the Staatsbibliothek Berlin receives around 5-6 million € in third-party funding every year.

This unit is responsible for project management at the Staatsbibliothek Berlin. It facilitates the successful planning, application and implementation of projects by advising project leaders and transferring knowledge.

2. Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin (ZLB)

The ZLB is Berlin's main public library and operates as both a central city library and the state library of Berlin. The visit took place at the Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek (AGB) and focused on inclusion, quality assurance, programming, and children's and youth services.

During the visit, we noted that the AGB provides a wide collection covering literature, art, music, film, and social sciences in different languages along with digital and multimedia resources. The library includes dedicated areas for study and research and hosts programs supporting education, accessibility, and cultural engagement.

Contacts included:

- Maria Stroth – Erasmus+ Program Coordinator
- Frau Leschke – Inclusion Section
- Verena Feistauer – Inventory and Quality Management
- Wiebke Rössig – Program Coordination
- Sarah Wildeisen – Children and Youth Library

Departments and Practices Observed

- **Inclusion Services:** The inclusion team designs and monitors accessible services across all ZLB branches. They follow the Berlin Accessibility Act and WCAG 2.0 standards for digital and physical access.

The library promotes social inclusion by engaging individuals with special needs in operational tasks such as reshelving and logistical support, offering them meaningful work

experience and active participation within a public cultural institution.

The Library of Alexandria proposed initiating a cooperation framework to share ideas for joint programs and international events that could be organized on a monthly basis.

- **Inventory and Quality Management:** Verena Feistauer's team maintains control over the library's collection development, cataloging, and weeding policies. They use standardized metrics for evaluating the quality and relevance of materials, ensuring transparency and consistency. The team also uses specialized tools and software for inventory control and statistical analysis. Through user feedback surveys, multilingual acquisition strategies, and regular evaluations, they keep the collection relevant, accessible, and well managed.



- **Program Offerings (Wiebke Rössig):** The ZLB organizes a wide range of cultural and educational programs, integrating public participation and creative engagement. Events are regularly evaluated based on attendance, feedback, and educational outcomes.

Its activities combine learning, media literacy, and cultural exchange through workshops, discussions, and exhibitions for all age groups.

The library provides digital literacy programs and multimedia spaces that support interactive learning and creativity, offering access to professional equipment for activities such as audio recording, video production and other digital creative projects.

- **Children and Youth Library (Sarah Wildeisen):** The Children's and Youth Library functions as both a recreational and educational space. It provides homework help, exam preparation support, creative workshops, and access to learning technology. The library's digital platform (#zlbdigital) extends engagement through online storytelling and craft programs.

It aims to introduce children and young people from preschool age through secondary school to the world of books and media, fostering reading, research, and digital literacy skills through interactive, age-appropriate activities. The staff highlighted their close collaboration with educational institutions, offering customized sessions for schools.

We also discussed future cooperation to develop an online collaboration program between the ZLB and the Library of Alexandria, focused on creating virtual joint activities and exchanges for students and young library users.

- **Learning and Advice Services:** Offers personal guidance and educational support for users of all ages, emphasizing lifelong learning as a quality metric.

Benchmarking for the Library of Alexandria

Based on the Library of Alexandria's existing infrastructure and services, the following benchmarking opportunities are recommended:

1. Strengthen inclusion and accessibility initiatives following the models of both SBB and ZLB. With the help of quality assurance develop a public accessibility policy and staff training program.
2. Integrate a Learning Centre concept within the Children's and Young People's Libraries to provide homework assistance, workshops, and mentorship.
3. Develop an online engagement platform similar to ZLB's #zlbdigital for children and teens.
4. Enhance digital accessibility and orientation tools, inspired by SBB's V:SCOUT navigation and barrier reporting features.
5. Implement regular user satisfaction surveys and publish quality performance reports.
6. Introduce specialized staff roles (e.g., inclusion coordinator, youth program officer) to enhance service focus.
7. Streamline borrowing and registration processes and make them more transparent for all user segments, including special-needs patrons.

Conclusion

The exchange visit to Berlin's leading libraries provided deep insight into European models of library quality assurance and inclusion. The Staatsbibliothek's structured management systems and the ZLB's user-centered programming present valuable models for the Library of Alexandria. By adopting similar frameworks, particularly in inclusion, service benchmarking, and community engagement, the Library of Alexandria can continue to advance as a regional leader in innovative and accessible library services.