

Summary



Dream or Drama? / On the Possible Role of Libraries in the European Union (Jan-Pieter Barbian)

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Since 2009 Europe has been experiencing one crisis after the other: the financial crisis, the Greek crisis, the refugee crisis. And then on June 23, 2016, Great Britain voted for the Brexit. Part of the pain that accompanied this learning process has been the cultural decimation in Britain. From 2010 until the end of 2015 the budgets of public libraries were cut by 16% (180 million pounds) and 106 branch libraries had to close.

Caught up in our own budgetary and personnel problems, we stood idly on the sidelines. Even though we are quite certain that public libraries are the ideal location for providing citizens with fundamental information about the process of European unification and its advantages. And then we wondered why the majority of the British voters wanted nothing more to do with the EU. Europe needs to become an on-going matter of interest within libraries once again! One of the venues for developing more awareness of this political necessity is at the German Library Conference. It offers a public forum where librarians from all EU countries can meet and discuss these issues with one another.

Set up under the motto »Creating Partnerships« a program could be established which would help form lasting institutional relationships between libraries in Europe based on an organized exchange of information and staff. Somewhat easier to achieve is the idea of establishing a „Window on Europe“ in every library. A clearly focused media collection with information about the EU and the specific effects of its political activities on the many areas of its citizens' lives would help sharpen public understanding of the value of this community.

Keeping Stock of Europe / The European Documentation Center – As Special Library and Information Center (Katrin Lück)

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They have been around for over 50 years – the European Documentation Centers, or EDZs. All these years they have been providing both scholars and the general public free access to the publications of the European Union, helping researchers with Europe-related topics while also organizing lectures, training courses and informational meetings on topics related to European integration. As libraries, archives and information centers they are an independent pillar of the European Commission within academic institutions, multipliers of information from and about the EU, and an interface between the commission, academia, and the EU's citizenry. In Germany alone there are 44 EDZs, usually associated with universities.

The duties of the EDZs' librarians and documentalists have been changing steadily over the years. Besides cataloging, classifying, and researching, they are involved today with publicity and public relations as well as event management. They offer training courses on the use of databases for a variety of user groups, ranging from scholars, students, school children, staff members of public agencies, and government employees. E-tutorials have been developed for learning how to use the most important EU databases. And although the quantity of reference questions has declined significantly due to the availability of free literature on the Internet, the quality of requests addressed to research specialists has greatly increased.

In recent years cooperation within the EDZ network has not only been greatly improved, but many EDZs are now working with other European partners as well. Together they sponsor lectures, discussions, consultation hours for citizens, exhibits at trade fairs and other exhibition sites, in order to remain in active contact with the citizens of the EU.

The Pop-Up Library in a Box – Idea Boxes / Libraries Without Borders Delivers Mobile Libraries to Conflict Areas (Haike Meinhardt)

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A project which has found considerable positive resonance in recent years in many conflict areas and troubled regions is the Idea Box. It all began with the realization that for the nearly 50 million refugees in this world it would often be possible to meet the basic needs of existence, but anything beyond these – the equally important emotional and intellectual needs – were being entirely neglected: information, education, creative pursuits, and entertainment are rarely found in refugee camps. Building up proper libraries in these conditions is hardly possible. There is a lack of funding, of involvement, of awareness, and also of professional input and infrastructure. A solution that would be achievable with minimal effort, while offering mobility and complete flexibility, seemed to be particularly promising. By putting thought into action, the multi-media portable and full-range library-in-a-box was born.

How closely the creators of the Idea Box stayed focused on the potential demands of life in a camp can be seen by looking at its contents. One part of the box contains everything necessary to hook up with the rest of the world via satellite or mobile communications, as well as 15 to 20 tablets, five laptops, and a server for the local network. The second part of the box is devoted to learning. It is a so-called traditional library in miniature, containing 250 printed books and 50 e-readers offering thousands of e-books, educational apps, and access to Wikipedia. In a third part of the box labeled »Entertainment and Games« there is a television and a projector which makes it possible to show 100 films and documentaries. Board games and video games can also be tried out. The last part of the cube focuses on creativity. Along with materials for artistic activities and handicrafts, there is also a good supply of electronic parts.

Translated by Martha Baker