Professional Study Visit to
Zentral- und Landesbibliothek
(Central & Regional Library, Berlin)

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I have visited ZLB (Central and Regional library, Berlin) in November, 2005 for two weeks. I spent most of my time with Information Services Team and learnt about German practices in face 2 face and virtual reference services, user education, use of ICT in libraries and in reference services

The Zentral- und Landesbibliothek was created in October 1995 by merging the Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek (American Memorial Library) in the district of Berlin-Kreuzberg (former West Berlin) and the Berliner Stadtbibliothek (Berlin City Library) – in the district of Berlin-Mitte (former East Berlin). Like many other institutions which were merged following the reunification, this means that they are housed in two buildings – one in the former East Berlin, and one in the former West. The Berlin City Library was founded in 1901 and was an academic universal library. The America Memorial-Library was founded in 1954 and was the first open-stack public library in Germany.

The ZLB has a combined stock of about 3.2 million media (85% are books) and with about 1,700,000 visitors annually, it is the most-visited cultural institution in Berlin and with the highest lending rates in Germany. More than 3.7 items has been borrowed during 2004. A staff of roughly 300 provides services for more than 90,000 active patrons. About 30,000 new reader cards are issued every year and more than 7000 user visit library each day.

Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek (American Memorial Library) has a large adult and children section which are inviting, filled not only with books, videos and DVDs but also with board games and pictorial books. Computers with internet access are also available can be used for half an hour on first come first serve basis. Shelves with moveable wheels in adult section make it easier to create extra space in less time for storytelling competition and other training courses.

ZLB (Central and Regional Library, Berlin) is providing virtual reference services through **QuestionPoint** which is jointly developed by the Library of Congress and the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), QuestionPoint is a web-based service that will allow users to manage their reference systems. QuestionPoint is an enhanced service of the Collaborative Digital Reference Service. It was launched in June 2002.

ZLB has translated QuestionPoint into seven languages i.e. Dutch, French, Polish, and Turkish. They are plans to translate it into Chinese, Korean and other EU languages in the near future. There is also discussion going on to include Goethe Institute in the collaboration.

Questions asked in French and Polish interfaces are directly sent to collaborative Libraries in France and Poland for answers and question asked in Turkish and

English are answered by specialist reference team with sound knowledge of English and Turkish languages and resources.

ZLB has maintained a database of more than 11000 web links. These links has been classified into broad subject areas. e.g. Internet, Librarianship, addresses and mailing lists, Politics, medicine, mathematics, technology, sports and hobby. There is also search facility for user to find information from the link collection page. One of the key factors of link collection database is selection of file names. Links have been assigned numbers same as library classification scheme as file names, which it make easier to classify these resources within already created subject areas. Link collection is regularly checked for updates and dead links are removed.

If all these links can be catalogued as website then users can search them by using OPAC interface. It will give user access to print as well as electronic resources at same time.

CD network comprise of more than 200 CDs divided into major subjects categories freely accessible from ZLB PC's covering areas of general interest to educational resources; like biographies, music, mathematics, politics, address, maps, sports etc. It is the largest network in all public libraries in Germany.

Dedicated workstations are available for visually impaired library user to access resources through catalogue, use of internet, searching electronic resources etc. Qualified staff is available to demonstrate how to you these facilities.

ZLB is also serving as a depository library for Berlin. Back copies of the journals are kept in basement store and they can be accessed by users on request.

The main reference desk is easy to find and well staffed and equipped with computers and staff can easily demonstrate how to you catalogue and online resources as well as answering all sorts of enquiries in German and English. One of the key differences between UK and German Libraries is dedicated reference desk in main subjects' areas; like Music, Law, Business, Languages and Fiction etc. This layout means you are never overlooked by librarians and you can get help in each section. There are tours for the library for different user groups and special information skills workshops for users throughout the year. Users are given welcome pack during induction which include leaflets produced with clear and effective instructions how to find resources.

There is facility for users to watch movies which are available on DVD or on VHS to music the library. They can also preview movies before checking out. In the music section as well as the stock there is a room with piano availability for interested library users.

Self issue kiosk is also available in main reading hall, with easy to follow instructions how to use self issue machine.

ZLB OPAC is available through internet and dedicated machine in the library to search renew and reserve books, videos, DVDs etc. There are two separate machines near the main entrance for user to renew their material before the library opens in the morning. (There is no book bin facility in the American Memorial Library). ZLB is one of the 135 participating libraries in Berlin public libraries network. Users with single library card can borrow material from all participating libraries. Unlike in UK users have to pay initial membership fee but after joining they can borrow videos, DVDs, music CDs without any cost which is not in practice in UK public libraries. The library's holdings form part of the union catalogue of Berlin's public libraries (VÖBB- https://www.voebb.de). Introductory computer courses for senior citizens in the Central and State Library are particularly popular, offering a peaceful and uninterrupted introduction to the world of networks.

ZLB is not only providing traditional library services to users in Berlin but also contributing nationally and international in the development of good practices in libraries.

It is very important to be open to other working practice> I found this opportunity useful to learn about the situation in German libraries and compare this to public libraries in UK.

I will share my experience with colleagues in my own library and also with wider library professional community. This professional study trip has given me greater awareness of the libraries in international perspective. It was also an invaluable opportunity and gave me chance to network with German colleagues and to make new contacts. This visit was important to me professionally because I am beginning to put together my portfolio for chartership.

I am most grateful to CILIP for contributing funds to make this visit possible. It has broadened my knowledge considerably and I have made many new contacts.

I would like to thank all the librarians who willingly gave up their time to show me around, answer my questions and in some cases discuss the evolution of their library planning and policies. I am very thankful especially to Christine-D Sauer, Paul S Ulrich, and Irini Courzakis for sharing their knowledge and experience and providing me valuable information about German libraries. I would like to thank Dr. Claudia Lux, Jutta Hanke, Ulrich Liang, who were most helpful with my application and arranging training sessions for me.