

Library Resources for Ethnic Minorities in the Federal Republic of Germany

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THE GERMAN FEDERAL REPUBLIC CONTAINS AT PRESENT 4 million foreign citizens.¹ Three million come from southern Europe, most of them Turks, Yugoslavs and Italians. One million are juveniles under the age of fifteen.

Most foreign workers arrived in the republic during the past two decades, ready to accept any kind of work. They have played their part in raising the standard of living, but their personal living conditions have been largely unsatisfactory and continue to be so. This is just as true of their poor living quarters as of their isolation in a strange environment.

The second and third generations are now growing up and the possibility of conflicts between parents and children exists. While the latter adapt more quickly to the new culture, parents suffer from culture shock. Unlike their children, they speak little German, they suppress expression of their problems to save their jobs, and they are in continual fear of the German authorities. Because of the shrinking employment opportunities during the past years and the unfavorable situation arising from inadequate schooling, the vocational and social situation of the second generation is very insecure. An article in *Der Spiegel* describes the foreign children as "social dynamite."²

In Nordrhein-Westfalen, one of the Länder constituting the Federal Republic, only 42 percent of foreign students completed intermediate school, compared with 82 percent of German students. The danger facing the second generation is also demonstrated by their dispropor-

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tionate share of criminal activity. In some parts of the republic, the figures are more than 50 percent higher than those for German juveniles. The Aliens Act provides that sentenced juveniles are in most cases rapidly deported, but they find that in their "home" country they are expatriates. This fate is also shared by many older workers who return voluntarily.³

The Goals of the Foreign Workers Policy

Many Germans wish that foreigners would go home. The Federal Republic is not an immigration country, but recently there have been discussions indicating a change of thinking. Possibly, it will be left to the individual to decide whether to remain in the Federal Republic or return to his country. The Foreign Workers Policy does not aim at Germanization, nor at assimilation, but at a treatment of foreign workers equal to that of native citizens, and the provision of adequate social and cultural services for them. This social process, however, is not a one-way street: the native citizens must also develop understanding of their foreign fellow citizens and their peculiarities. The bilingual principle presumes that for the present generation of foreigners living among us, knowledge of the mother tongue and preservation of cultural identity is just as important as learning German and understanding their new culture. The foreigner therefore has a choice.

A comprehensive program for a foreigners' policy has to include research into the varied cultural needs of ethnic groups. Several countries offer excellent examples of how libraries can help ethnic groups. Of course, many problems besetting linguistic minorities cannot be solved by books. Nevertheless, the offering of literature in original languages is an important contribution to the maintenance of cultural identity. Once the language of the new country is learned, its literature will facilitate the adaptation into the different culture and way of life of the new environment.

In 1973 a working group was formed in the Federal Republic with financial support from the Federal Minister for Education and Science and was composed of the following members: International Youth Library, München; Einkaufszentrale (EKZ) für Öffentliche bibliotheken (Purchasing center for public libraries), Reutlingen; the Arbeitsstelle für das Bibliothekswesen (Office for library organization), Berlin; City Library of Duisburg; and City Library of Frankfurt am Main. The working group assigned itself the following tasks:

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1. sorting and examination of suitable literature in original languages, and compilation of select lists with annotations and catalog-style entries;
2. provision of information on supply channels, central purchasing, and central binding; and
3. preparation of publicity materials.

The working group, and sometimes the International Youth Library alone, has published select and supplementary lists in a southern European language. A portion of the listed titles has been taken into stock by the EKZ and offered as blocks of books, with cards, to libraries. Further collaboration was achieved with Bibliotekstjänst, the central service agency of Swedish libraries in Lund; the EKZ accepted titles from the list of selections by Bibliotekstjänst. This is a beginning of a necessary international cooperation in the field of literature supply for ethnic groups. More than 100 public libraries in the federal republic have started to build collections and have added to them regularly. One hundred thirty thousand copies of a four-color folder in comic-book format were offered to libraries as publicity material. Early in 1980 the working group was also able to distribute bilingual posters free of charge.

In April 1977, the group began a survey with a questionnaire. Libraries were asked to report on their prevailing activities and their problems in serving linguistic minorities. The evaluation of the questionnaires proved that there is still a great deal of uncertainty about information on suitable titles and channels of supply. In order to remedy this situation, the group drafted a "Memorandum for Acquisition and Preparation of Foreign-language Literature for Foreign Workers." This memorandum can still be requested from the City Library of Frankfurt am Main.

Potential and Limitations of Library Work

The possibilities and limitations of library service to foreign fellow citizens may be illustrated with some examples.

The Berlin district of Kreuzberg, which is densely settled with foreigners, established what was originally a general foreign-language library for several ethnic groups. Because of the strong Turkish element in this part of the city, however, this library grew into an institution stocking Turkish literature almost exclusively, and only a negligible amount of German books. The library's name is now Namik-Kemal-Bibliothek.

The library is run by an energetic Turk who has acquired a good deal of professional knowledge and who represents authority to the users. The library is not intended to be a meeting place, lest political and religious differences, prevalent among the Turks, inhibit regular library service. The atmosphere in the rooms is quiet and orderly. The staff has established their own channel of supply in Turkey, with direct access to publishers and economical purchasing arrangements.

The Sachsenhausen branch library in Frankfurt am Main demonstrates the problems created when the library is also conceived as a meeting place. Right after its opening in new, attractive premises, young persons, including many foreign children, came into the branch and stayed for hours. This caused commotion and noise and complaints by other users. In order to know more about the intentions of juvenile users, they were asked to write down their wishes; the following list is the result:

1. The exhibition room and the games room should be reserved for us.
2. We want permission to smoke from age fourteen on; we could smoke on the terrace where nobody is bothered.
3. We want a person to show us games and films.
4. We would like to listen to music in the exhibition room.
5. It has always been crazy to forbid eating of candy, sandwiches, etc. in the library.
6. The library should be open Mondays and closed Saturdays.
7. We do not want to be watched like little kids.
8. It is also crazy to have to show the ID card all the time.
9. One should be allowed to stay from 11 A.M. to 6 P.M.

The list contains twelve signatures and is dated May 8, 1975. The important points of this listing are the demand for personal attention, and the wish to stay in the library for hours, engaged in activities with hardly any relation to usual functions of the library.

Some information was gathered on services for foreign children through a one-year project carried out by two social workers. This study arose from the realization that librarians are not adequately equipped for the kind of work with youth which demands educational and psychological knowledge. On the other hand, it was also learned that social workers on their own cannot solve the problems of user care in libraries. They are too involved in their own professional concepts and want to do youth work which goes beyond the established function of the library. The library is no substitute for a youth center. Another result of the project was the realization that it is hardly possible to look after children from different nationalities in a group together with German children. This so-called multicultural principle contains many contradictions which we as researchers were incapable of resolving.⁴

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For that reason, we shall continue our service in the Sachsenhausen branch library through structuring programs tailored for groups, with the possibility of arranging, from time to time, programs open to all groups. Space and personnel limitations force us to accept only children less than fourteen years old. Service must be library oriented, and failure in this will lead to conflict with the administration and political organs. Thus, the Frankfurt Civic Parliament demanded that care of children should be under the social services department rather than cultural services.

The programs designed by librarians for the foreign children relate to the library and to literature. They present specific areas of literature, especially those relating to geography. This is in accordance with the expressed wish of foreign teachers, who see here the possibility of strengthening the children's identification with their home country. At the same time, children are acquainted with distinguished writers from their home country. Children can learn from examples how texts, illustrations and books are made. In the library-related part, librarians explain how to use the library. The work of librarians is supplemented by hourly paid assistants with knowledge of education.

It cannot be asserted that all libraries face a similar situation as the one described for Sachsenhausen. The exemplary library work with and for ethnic minorities in Canada, especially by the Toronto Public Library, was impressively reported by Leonard Wertheimer at the international seminar "Children of Foreign Fellow-Citizens and Their Literature" held during the 1978 Frankfurt Book Fair.⁵ It seems clear that in any library used by minorities, some program of assistance should be developed.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that good results have been achieved in Duisburg with a traveling library. Within the framework of a pilot experiment, it went directly into the areas of foreign settlement and was heavily used. Towns with a strong concentration of foreign citizens should study carefully the Duisburg experiment.

Better Working Bases Are Essential

Library work for foreign citizens presents public libraries in the Federal Republic of Germany with many problems. In most cases they are inadequately equipped for their extended tasks. Personnel is lacking, as are linguist staff members. Shortage of space does not allow provision of reading corners and club rooms. Financial resources to add to collections in original languages are limited. For that reason an urgent plea must be made to political bodies and to the administration,

to establish posts for linguist staff members, at least in the major libraries, and to provide funds for necessary acquisition of material.

Collaboration with other bodies devoted to services to foreigners, e.g., schools, trade unions, churches, and others, may lead to better results. In view of the fact that libraries in many countries face identical problems in looking after the needs of linguistic minorities, an international commission of experts should be formed. Its task would be to ensure close international cooperation in selection and acquisition of foreign-language books, and to appeal to international and national political bodies and professional organizations to give attention to the prevailing problems.

References

1. This article has been translated from German by Leonard Wertheimer, and is an updated version of an earlier article by the author entitled "Bibliothekarbeit mit ausländischen Mitbürgern," *Buch und Bibliothek* 31:432-36, May 1979. The publishers have kindly given permission for reuse in this article.
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