

Summary



MOOCs on the Increase / Massive Open Online Courses Booming in the U.S. and Asia – Should German Libraries Get Prepared? (Kirsten Jeude, Klaus Tochtermann)
(pp. 38 – 41)

Libraries, especially university libraries, are in the midst of a comprehensive process of transforming themselves into modern providers of an information infrastructure that goes far beyond guaranteeing access to the printed word. This is the result of the ever increasing permeation of the Internet, the rapidly changing palette of internet-based tools – especially in the field of social media – and the subsequent changes in user behavior.

In this context new areas of concern have arisen to which libraries must give intensive attention. These include the management of research data as an extension of their classical form of publication, guaranteeing the accessibility of library services via mobile devices, or the issues connected with Science 2.0 and how social media change the processes of research and publication.

A further topic for the future involves massive open online courses, the so-called MOOCs, which are large-scale online courses for collaborative, interlinked learning at an academic level and open to (nearly) anyone. Since 2011 there has been a rapid increase in MOOCs at universities in the U.S., and Asian countries have been following suit. In contrast, in Germany, MOOCs have not yet begun to play a significant role in academic instruction. For centuries, however, academic libraries have played a clear role in the support of research and teaching as the distributor of academic resources and provider of informational infrastructure, and therefore it stands to reason that libraries take a position on this development.

It remains to be seen whether the trend set in the U.S. and Asia will also unfold in Germany. Yet libraries would do well to put a mark their own space in this new, and mostly still unoccupied terrain, in order to be able to play an important role for MOOCs from the very beginning.

Providing Services Based on Available Funds / The Future of Public Libraries is Heavily Dependent on Financial and Structural Capacity of Local Authorities (Jan-Pieter Barbian)
(pp. 42 – 44)

Viewed from a distance, the statistics of German librarianship are impressive. In a report published by the German Library Association (dbv) titled »Report on the State of Libraries«, the nearly 10,000 member libraries hold more than 400 million items, have 10.5 million active users, 216 million visitors, and 466 million loans per year. Without a doubt this statistical proof of success is justified. Yet when one looks behind the scenes, reality gives little cause for optimism about the future.

The report also contains an overview of current cost-saving measures in public libraries. Despite record-breaking tax income for the federal, state, and local governments, budget cuts have been set for 62.5 percent of the libraries in cities with more than 400,000 inhabitants. The cuts will affect both the acquisitions budgets and staffing. In 12.5 percent of the libraries surveyed are struggling with cuts in personnel. By engaging volunteers in order to prevent the closure of smaller libraries, the libraries themselves are even providing evidence that professional staffing is not absolutely essential for their operation.

However, communal deficits are hardly limited to their finances. In the past twenty years, we have seen a revolutionary transformation in the world of media. IT innovations continue to take place in ever faster cycles. Public administrators can hardly keep up with this rate of change and are blocking the need for permanent innovation through their out-of-date IT structures.

The practice-based ideas needed to respond to these challenges are nowhere to be found. This can only lead to a dramatic decline in the use of libraries, especially in structurally weaker communities, and, ultimately, in entire regions which have no professionally-run public libraries.

Original and Digital / The Written Cultural Artifact is a Treasure – and a Duty / An Appeal at the 10th Anniversary of the Weimar Library Fire (Ranga Yogeshwar)
(pp. 64 – 68)

On September 2, 2004, a fire broke out in the Duchess Anna Amalia Library in Weimar. Invaluable cultural artifacts were lost in the flames. Librarians and archivists are still today affected by this traumatic experience. On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of this catastrophe, Ranga Yogeshwar, a nationally known science journalist and television host, has written an appeal for a more efficient protection of cultural assets for BuB:

»Fortunately there is in the meantime an »Alliance for the Preservation of Written Cultural Assets«, a coalition of archives and libraries holding extensive historical collections. This alliance, it claims, »aims to protect the existence of endangered objects of the rich cultural and scientific tradition in Germany, and to ensure that this national goal of preservation is anchored in public awareness.«

»Naturally it is not easy for those in charge to come up with adequate financial backing, yet there is no alternative. The repair and maintenance of roads and bridges has been neglected for years already. Minor damages have grown large, overdue repairs have hence become more expensive. Undoubtedly it was not sensible to have waited so long, but – even though costly – nothing was lost. New asphalt and cement will put our streets and bridges back into shape.«

»But things are quite different for our cultural assets. Culture is alive we are often told, but even living organisms can perish. 60 million printed works in German libraries show signs of damage, a third of these are even considered badly damaged.«

»The past is in the process of dying and we are merely bystanders, not taking an active measures. In the case of a human victim this would be considered negligence. Only thorough systematic protection and restoration will it be possible to keep these works alive.«

Translated by Martha Baker