

Summary



»The less bureaucracy, the easier the way into the library« / Yilmaz Holtz-Ersahin Recommends Supplying Free Library Cards to Refugees as Welcoming Gesture in BuB Interview

(pp. 516 – 520)

The number of refugees arriving in Germany is very high and will continue to rise. The Federal Ministry for Migration and Refugees expects to receive more than 400,000 applications for asylum in 2015, twice as many as in the year before. The effects of this trend are felt in nearly every town around the country. In an interview with Bernd Schleh, BuB's editor, Yilmaz Holtz-Ersahin, a librarian at the Duisburg Municipal Library, explains how libraries can contribute to the integration of refugees. An expert on Turkish migration, he states that »the strength of libraries in comparison with other public institutions is that they offer a private, open-minded and knowledge-oriented environment«.

In a new, safe home, refugees need first of all to acquire German-language skills and information about cultural life and the legal framework of Germany. As a first step, libraries could offer multilingual information, foreign-language media for children and adults, as well as flyers and brochures about life in Germany. Whenever possible, libraries could act as a point-of-contact.

Furthermore, Holtz-Ersahin's expertise in the area of integration leads him to call for libraries to give refugees a special status. »The less bureaucracy, the easier the way into the library. A free library card, even if only for a limited time, would be helpful.« Refugees are usually not in a position to pay a membership fee. Yilmaz Holtz-Ersahin states, »Especially at the beginning, the introductory phase, fees would be a hindrance. Perhaps libraries can arrange free access in cooperation with their municipal funding agency. Or local citizens, clubs, and foundations could become sponsors.«

The »Asylotheek« as a Bridge to the Public Library / Successful Private Initiative in Nuremberg – Further Projects Planned Throughout Germany (Günter Reichert)

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The idea for an asylum library (»Asylotheek«) was conceived during the opening ceremony of the communal residence hall for 167 asylum-seekers and refugees in Nuremberg on July 13, 2012. Nine weeks later, on September 14, 2012, the first asylum library in Germany opened its doors, offering a modest educational collection – and more – to the residents. In this article, the initiator presents a project which soon aroused nationwide attention and has already been replicated many times.

When the residence hall in Nuremberg opened, there were neither social aid services nor a cultural orientation plan, much less a minimal amount of educational services available. In light of the basic need for political education of asylum seekers and in terms of the existing legal framework regarding their situation – such as inability to get a work permit or the approval to attend a language course only after recognition of the asylum application – the situation was extremely unsatisfactory. And it was exasperated by the conflicts related to the tight living conditions in Nuremberg's Gostenhof-Ost quarter.

As a result, the organizers consciously chose to develop a project for which they would not need to apply for public funding. »Involvement in place of money« became the motto. Furnishings, books, language courses, computers, photocopiers, etc. were to be organized with the help of donations from the city's residents. The five-days-a-week opening hours were to be covered entirely with volunteers, who offered a wide range of programs late in the afternoon and evenings. Furthermore, the asylum seekers themselves were expected to take on responsibility and, among other things, act as language trainers.

Tilting at Windmills / Problems and Perspectives for Public Libraries

(pp. 552 – 554)

»Libraries are more than lending stations,« according to Henning Bleyl, winner of the Journalism Prize of German Libraries 2014. In an excerpt of the speech he gave at the 575th anniversary of the City Library of Hannover, which is published in this issue, he explains his position as follows:

The writer Kathrin Passig recently described libraries as paper museums. Libraries have a problem with their image. Even though most public libraries have plenty of future potential, it is nonetheless possible that they may be devoured by that future. Why does a society need libraries if knowledge of every possible kind can be found on the Internet? Even now libraries can only afford to purchase smaller numbers of non-fiction and self-help books. Wouldn't it be sufficient to provide a computer service center that makes fictional works available as e-Books?

There is a danger that libraries will be cut off electronically, become digitally mothballed, so to speak. There is not enough funding to provide full-scale wireless access. There is no money for the acquisition of book-scanners and Internet PCs cannot be continually updated. It is astounding that not even half of the public libraries run by professional librarians offer any electronic media. And many publishers still refuse to sell libraries licenses for e-Books.

Today a library is not only a site for borrowing, but also a place to spend time in. Hence it is perfectly acceptable to reduce the collections. More than half of the borrowings a book experiences takes place in its first two years in the library. After that it is read less and less, hence becoming more and more lifeless. Libraries need to muster up their courage to reduce their collections! There needs to be a change of paradigm, a shift from collection orientation to user-oriented library work. But this kind of re-orientation is under dispute – even within the profession.

Translated by Martha Baker