

**Libraries and the Information Society in Germany. An Introduction.**  
**Engelbert Plassmann, Hermann Rösch, Jürgen Seefeldt, Konrad Umlauf. Transl. by**  
**Dale Askey and Jennifer Drake Askey. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014. 360p.**

This study presents German libraries and librarianship as they have developed in the information society to an international professional audience. The German original – *Bibliotheken und Informationsgesellschaft in Deutschland* – appeared in 2006 and in a second, updated edition in 2011. For this English edition, it was revised in relevant areas to bring it up to date.

This book has established itself as a standard reference in Germany. In contrast to the introduction to German libraries and librarianship by Jürgen Seefeldt and Ludger Syré (*Portale zu Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Bibliotheken in Deutschland*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2011, Olms Verlag) – translated into English (*Portals to the Past and to the Future: Libraries in Germany*) and nine other languages – it is not only more detailed and extensive, but also adheres to a different central idea.

The authors selected a systems theory approach to analyze German libraries and librarianship and to present possible developments. By so doing, they broke new ground. Previous expositions viewed the subject from an internal perspective and thus gave expression to the self-image and self-perception of librarians. From this primarily descriptive point of view, one can examine the material and elucidate the details that those who wish to become successful library practitioners must know. Yet the analytical and critical elements often come up short in this classical perspective, such that structures and options for future developments can only emerge in limited form.

An analysis of the German library system via a systems theory methodology yields particularly rich insights; the system distinguishes itself with its remarkable degree of well organized division of labor and over 100 years of established cooperation. Most libraries in Germany participate in interlibrary loan, an efficient form of cooperation. Cataloging occurs through division of labor in consortia, with the result that the integration of external records could be taken for granted. Collaborative collection development through the special collection program (Sondersammelgebietsprogramm, SSG) – which is, however, presently being subjected to fundamental change – enabled the creation of comprehensive collections of the scientifically relevant literature and information in all major languages in numerous libraries.

These structures based on the division of labor reflect German history, the long-term characteristic of which was many smaller states working with, alongside, or against each other. For that reason, it was not until 1912 that a German national library was founded (the Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig). Only since 2006 has this institution borne the name "German National Library" (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, DNB). Its collections lack historical depth. This is in turn offset by the division of labour and cooperation: six libraries systematically collect, each for a given century, those imprints that appeared in the German language, in the old German empire, or in the individual German states. The historical antagonisms may perhaps have contributed to the fact that in the end a modern library system developed in Germany, which in its structure anticipated the idea that shapes the information society, namely a network where labor is divided.

The work is structured so that at the beginning global and general relationships are treated before narrowing to specialties. The first chapter covers conceptual basics as well as sketching the development paths from historical and sociological vantage point. After the macrosociological perspective, the second chapter outlines the internal development of the functional system of library science. In this segment, in addition to technology the development of the isolated single library to a functionally distinct library system stands in the foreground. Subsequent chapters sharpen the contours of the argumentation and make it concrete.

The third chapter depicts the German library field under typological, institutional, and legal aspects. Even at this stage it is clear how very familiar categories and structures, for

example, require modification with regard to typological divisions. Also with regard to the legal framework, adjustments have already been made or are in progress that address the peculiarities of digital media.

Functional differentiation leads by definition to a clear increase in cooperation and networking. The fourth chapter discusses their forms and modes. Numbered among these in addition to cooperation in associations and cooperation with non-library funders and partner are, in particular, cooperative projects to improve the functions of the individual library (acquisitions, cataloging, circulation, reference, etc.), but above all national projects such as the system of virtual research libraries or the German Digital Library (Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek, DDB).

The more the division of labor process proceeds, the greater the need for agreements that govern the process of allocation of functions, but also the process of contributing and jointly using results within the system. The fifth chapter takes this aspect into account and deals with norms and standards, guidelines, and recommendations, which now play a role in the library and information field.

The information society can also be viewed as a sophisticated form of the service society. In any case, service orientation has singular importance. Also for this reason, the sixth chapter defines without exception all library activities as services, which has not been typical at this scale before. The chapter treats both the fundamental characteristics of information services as well as specific library information services, from archiving to reference and information retrieval to knowledge management.

The scope and diversification of library services has increased continuously in recent decades. The requirements of the system environment can be met only under the condition that library work is planned and carried out with professional business management methods. Therefore, the seventh chapter deals with relevant topics such as marketing, personnel management, accounting, etc.

Education and training are in the foreground in chapter eight. Change and the uncertainty inevitably associated with change manifest themselves first in this segment. Future-oriented thinking is particularly salient for the education of new talent. To make education and training more than a professional initiation rite, one must anticipate development probabilities. The common and persistent changes in the curriculum, the development of new courses of study, and the introduction of new academic degrees – as described in this chapter – show that the seismograph "education and training" indicates continuing changes for library and information science.

The intention of the authors with this work is to go new directions and point to still others. Even the plural "directions" indicates that this is neither a one-way street nor an established route.