

**Public Libraries as part of the Democratic Process¹
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Networking in a Capital - Public Libraries in Berlin

Public libraries in the Federal Republic of Germany do not have legally binding duties, but are part of the so-called voluntary services of either the states or the communes.

Situation at the end of 1989

When the Wall fell, the public libraries in Berlin were confronted with two halves of a city which for 25 years had a contrary development under different political systems:

- 11 East Berlin borough libraries with their branch libraries and the Berlin City Library
- 12 West Berlin borough library-systems with very different organizations and operations as well as the America Memorial Library

Neither half of the city had a common catalog of it's library holdings. Only the America Memorial Library had a computer system.

The further development of the Berlin public libraries was fundamentally influenced by the following factors

1. Their integration in the structure of the Berlin administration
2. Creation of the ZLB (Berlin Central and regional Library) Foundation
3. Area reform and Administration reform in Berlin
4. Financial crisis and
5. The founding of the Berlin Public Library Network (Verbund der Öffentlichen Bibliotheken Berlins - VOEBB)

1. Structure of the Berlin administration

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Since Berlin is both a federal state and a city, the Berlin administration is structured hierarchically on two levels:

- the main Senate administration with the task of overall urban responsibility
- the borough administrations as independent administrations with borough-like tasks, however without financial and personnel supremacy

As far as the public libraries were concerned, the administration structures in East and West Berlin were comparable - West and East Berlin public libraries were integrated within the two-leveled administrative system to the boroughs.

Already in 1990 the directors of the borough libraries of what used to be West and East Berlin created a joint working group, which as a professional body was to promote cooperation.

2. Creation of the ZLB Foundation

In 1995 the Berlin Central and Regional Library Foundation (Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin - ZLB) was constituted by the state of Berlin by merging the America Memorial Library (in West Berlin) and the Berlin City Library (in East Berlin).

The ZLB is financed with a subsidy from the state of Berlin, and is therefore assigned to the state within the two-tiered Berlin administration.

A scientific public library with two locations was thus created. This library has approximately 1.7 million visitors per year, an annual circulation of approximately 3 million media and holdings of 2.3 million media.

Both houses of the ZLB are connected via the city MAN (metropolitan area network). A common ZLB network with catalogs, internet access, an intranet with a CD-ROM network and the complete office communication supports the organization and the work flow.

At the time this foundation was created, the 23 autonomous borough library systems, each with a main library and several branch libraries, was retained without a common Berlin-wide catalog. In 1993 these borough library systems had total holdings of almost 6.7 million media with over 22 million circulations annually.

The ZLB was legally assigned the role as service provider for the borough systems. However, it is not the central library of the autonomous borough library systems.

3. Area reform and administration reform

In 1998 the city parliament passed an area reform law: on January 1, 2001, the number of boroughs would be reduced from 23 to 12. The result was 12 boroughs with approximately the same number of inhabitants (300,000).

In several instances boroughs from the former east and west halves of the city were fused, for example Mitte (East) and Kreuzberg (West) and Friedrichshain (East).

A consequence of the fusion was that administrative and work cultures which had developed independently in the borough libraries over the years had to be adjusted, organization and equipment brought to the same level and work structures and locations standardized.

The number of senior positions was reduced by almost 50%, many employees were assigned new areas of work.

Considerable changes within the structure of the borough systems were mandatory - for example, as a result of the reform the number of central borough libraries had to be reduced from 23 to only 12.

The merger brought considerable rationalizations - the borough structures were investigated and many of the small libraries were closed.

Administration reform

Parallel to the area reform was an administrative reform in the state of Berlin; a new public management was introduced.

This had considerable consequences for the administrative and organizational structure of the borough library systems. Cost performance calculations were introduced and library products had to be defined.

The libraries in the individual boroughs were assigned very different positions within their respective borough administrative structures.

4. Financial crisis

Berlin is in a serious financial crisis.

The reasons for this are, among others, the discontinuation of Federal funding for (the former West) Berlin, the far-reaching structural changes within the city since 1990, the extraordinary financial demands resulting from the reunification, the deterioration of the overall economic situation and numerous erroneous political decisions. The state of Berlin has a 39 billion Euro debt. Berlin is bankrupt and is close to declaring insolvency. The effect for the public libraries is disastrous.

As far as the overall picture goes, a comparison of the years from 1992 to 2001 shows that the expenditures of Berlin public libraries for media acquisitions has been reduced by about 63%.

This has resulted in a decline of media offerings from 1993 to 2001 of over 29% - from barely 8 million to under 5.2 million media.

Also personnel funding has been reduced drastically. From 1995 to 2001 the personnel budget of the borough Tempelhof-Schöneberg, for example, has been reduced by about 17.4%.

By the year 2006 a billion Euro in personnel costs are supposed to be eliminated from the civil service budget of the state of Berlin.

5. The Berlin Public Library Network (Verbund der Öffentlichen Bibliotheken Berlins - VOEBB)

The creation of a common computerized network is the result of a vision of several generations of librarians. The original idea dates from 1969. At the end of the seventies more concrete plans were made for a catalog and circulation network.

The seed of the VOEBB vision is the idea of close cooperation among the VOEBB participants: Through cooperation the expenses for the individual participants will be reduced and simultaneously the existing potential of the Berlin public library network will be optimized: each individual member library contributes its resources in order to benefit from the resources of the others.

The lengthy planning in the seventies and eighties finally led to a decision by the city parliament in 1995 and to the allotment of 20 million [DM] for the creation of a computer network with automated acquisition, cataloging and circulation.

Beginning in 1998 the aDIS/ BMS software was successively introduced from borough to borough; by the end of 2001 it was installed in all the boroughs.

The 12 borough libraries systems, each with the borough central library, the main library as well as several smaller branch libraries, belong to the network. Likewise the Central and Regional Library (with both its houses) participates in the VOEBB. Finally, 4 school libraries in 4 upper-grade centers or high schools are also participants in the network.

Members of the VOEBB are now altogether about 120 libraries with far more than 1.200 workplaces.

The VOEBB Catalog includes about 8 Mill items, books, CDs etc. offering its media holdings via a common electronic network catalogue <https://www.voebb.de>

The main libraries in the boroughs are connected via the Berlin MAN, the branch libraries via ISDN. In a pilot phase the integration of the mobile

libraries is being tested. Data transfer is achieved with a cellular phone/laptop solution via GPRS.

The duties of the network are

- expansion, maintenance and development of the network catalog
- development, creation and marketing of information and reference services
- coordination, expansion and development of networked circulation and media mailing.

Although cataloging is done decentrally, a title record is only entered once in the system and the other members attach local holdings to it. There is a joint foreign data pool.

Because a joint patron file is maintained, each patron need only register once and can access his account and pay any outstanding fines from any library in the network.

Unfortunately there are still considerable problems improving and updating the software and improving the performance of the system. These problems have a high priority and it is most important that they will be solved.

VOEBB - New Services

The network offers far-reaching new services for patrons of Berlin public libraries.

Each patron no longer has only access to the holdings of his borough library or the libraries in his locality. The VOEBB-OPAC makes the holdings of the most distant library accessible for everyone; even from the smallest Berlin library. Each patron has access to the complete holdings within the network. Information is given whether a media is currently in the library, if it is not available (on loan, being processed), it can be reserved. There is a - fee based² - delivery service from any library to any library as well as to any working place or even home delivery. The OPAC permits patrons to check the current status of their personal accounts and to make media renewals.

The same services are offered in the Web-OPAC; furthermore, renewals are possible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with the interactive voice response system "VOEBB-Phone."

One can say that the holdings of the Berlin public libraries have been merged into a virtual library and are accessible around the clock. The public libraries in Berlin have moved closer together, they have become interchangeable for patrons.

² Fees: <http://www.zlb.de/bibliothek/>

The network has been well-received by the Berliners: Viewed statistically, each Berliner visited a public library twice in the year 2001: 7,011,667 library visits were made to public libraries of the Berlin boroughs. The public libraries thus remain the most-used educational and cultural facilities in Berlin.

120,000 delivery services were made within the first year among the VOEBB libraries or to business or private addresses. That corresponds to the media holdings of an average Berlin borough central library.

At a glance

The public libraries of the twelve Berlin boroughs 2001 (as at December 31 2001)

Inhabitants of Berlin	3.337.232
Library units	145
Staff (posts)	1.104
Expenditures for media DM	5.000.304
Holdings	5.200.304
Library visits	7.011.667
Loans (media)	15.934.999
Loans (per inhabitant)	4,77

(Quelle: Angaben der Öffentlichen Bibliotheken für die Grund- und Leistungsdaten 2001 / Auszug)

ZLB

Staff (posts)	297
Expenditures for media DM	3.949.565
Holdings	2.361.612
Library visits (ca.)	1.700.000
Loans (media)	3.147.408

VOEBB - Pressure for structural changes

Currently an intensive discussion on the future organization of the Berlin public libraries is taking place.

With the network, the Berlin public libraries have a modern, expensive, technical infrastructure and customer-oriented services; the borough budgets, however, hardly have any money to buy new media. (Of the 50 million Euro budgeted for the borough libraries and the ZLB, only about 6% is for acquisitions.)

The Network Conference as the supreme decision committee for basic and particularly significant issues has a strong influence on the structure and the work processes of the individual libraries.

This is where considerable pressures for change originates.

The questions are:

- How will the duties be apportioned in the future between the ZLB and the borough libraries?
- What organizational relationship should they have to each other?

There is a considerable breadth and heterogeneity in Berlin both in regard to the social as well as to the urban architecture and landscape.

Technically the VOEBB represents a virtual library independent of any local binding, but the strength of the borough libraries lies precisely in their local bonds. Within a city-wide organization with 120 libraries, how can the decentral flexibility and ability to react be retained?

There are endeavors to remove the Berlin libraries from the boroughs and to fuse them under the roof of the ZLB into a large library institution. And there are attempts to centralize the borough libraries into a large library organization outside the boroughs as an independent organization without ZLB. And finally, there are considerations of possibly retaining the borough libraries within the borough structure while simultaneously strengthening the network organization.

Conclusion

Should the outstanding software and performance problems be solved and sufficient operating funding be secured, the network will be an important development platform for Berlin's public libraries. It's technically-caused pressures have already instigated standardization of work processes and usage conditions.

It's true potential lies in the technically-caused banding together of the borough libraries and the ZLB, in forcing standardization of working operations and in bringing the very autonomous borough library systems into an organizational form acceptable to all with corresponding rights and responsibilities.

The Network of Berlin Public Libraries exerts a considerable impetus and motivation for the networking and the cooperation of the Berlin public libraries. Technically, it counterbalances the autonomy of the boroughs and will have long-lasting major effects on the structure, content and mentality of the Berlin library landscape.

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