



# Public Libraries in the Hamburg Metropolitan Area

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THE OFFICIAL NAME—"The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg"—calls to mind the glorious heritage of municipal freedom during the German Middle Ages; but present day metropolitan Hamburg does not show any of the characteristics of those far-off times. The oldest buildings still standing date from the seventeenth century, and there are only a few of these left. Although the original plan of the town and the site of the fortifications can still be seen from the arrangement of the main streets, Hamburg is not rich in visible marks of its early traditions. This lack of architectural remains is due partly to the Great Fire of 1842, when large portions of the old city were destroyed. It is also due to the ruthless, as well as admirable, vitality of the city's residents during the second half of the last century. These citizens, whose commercial interests ranged all around the world, are responsible for the spacious planning of the inner city with the Alster basins and the large-scale extension of the harbor, and at the same time they are responsible for the dreary city streets with their shabby tenement houses.

During the 1920's, famous architects tried to solve the housing problem. As one of the consequences of the bombings of World War II, space for new planning became available. Although the inner city remained nearly undestroyed, it was necessary to work out an area wide rebuilding plan because 60 per cent of all residences were destroyed. Today Hamburg offers the fascinating spectacle of an old city vanishing while the outlines of a new city are appearing. The main feature of Hamburg is no longer just its harbor, but there are growing industries, administrative centers, the University of Hamburg, schools of art, and many other cultural activities. Hamburg is a modern city or—more modestly—it is on the way to becoming a modern city.<sup>1</sup>

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Not counting Berlin, Hamburg is by far the largest city of the Federal Republic of Germany, with a population of 1.8 million. The next largest city, Munich, has a population of more than one million, and all the other towns have a population of less than 800,000. This exceptional size is due to the "Greater Hamburg Act," which dates from 1937, when three former Prussian towns, Altona, Harburg and Wandsbek, together with their rural districts, were annexed by the city of Hamburg. The Act was the last step in the consolidation of the four towns whose divided administration, economy, and culture was becoming more and more senseless. Nevertheless, it was not easy to incorporate the autonomous towns into a large community with one central administration, and the process of incorporation is still not finished. The problem which remains is to balance central administration with the local interests of the single districts.

In order to take this into account, the city was divided into seven administrative districts; three of them are the former Prussian towns, and the remaining four are parts of the old city. These districts, different in size and in population, have their own councils, which are called "Bezirksversammlungen." These councils are considered to be the representatives of the people, while at the same time they have to represent the requirements of the central administration to the citizens. Because these councils lack control of the budget, they have no real power. This makes a difference in the district administration of Hamburg and of Berlin. Hamburg as well as Bremen, another Hanseatic City, is a "Land" having direct representation in the parliament of the Federal Republic.

In the field of culture, there are two different central authorities, each presided over by a senator. The City Authority for Education controls all schools (including the University of Hamburg with its institutes) and the State and University Library. The City Authority for Cultural Affairs controls the theaters, museums, High School of Music, High School of Art, and the Hamburg Public Libraries.

As is so often found in German cities, there are two different kinds of library systems, the scholarly libraries and the public libraries. There is no connection between them, and the librarians get their professional training in different schools. The 1957 directory of special and research libraries in Hamburg lists more than 250 different ones;<sup>2</sup> most are financed by the "Land" of Hamburg, the rest have various sources of support. The World Economic Archives ("Weltwirtschaftsarchiv"), for instance, with a reference stock of 451,000 volumes and

10,546 German and foreign periodicals, is supported by the "Land" of Hamburg and by a federation of the North German countries. The Commercial Library, with a book stock of 75,000 volumes and 1,317 German and foreign periodicals, is supported by the Chamber of Commerce. One of the most modern libraries is the Max-Planck-Institut für ausländisches und Internationales Privatrecht with a reference collection of 105,000 volumes.

The most important library that forms part of the North Germany Union Catalogue is the Hamburg State- and University Library, supplemented by the college libraries. The State- and University Library has a book stock of about one million volumes and receives 4,662 periodicals in German and foreign languages. It developed out of the old city library which was founded in the fifteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The State- and University Library was severely damaged during World War II. The building was destroyed, 710,000 volumes were burned, and the book stock further reduced by the removal of valuable books, all of which have not yet been returned.<sup>4</sup> In addition, it has also been necessary to cope with the unexpected growth of the university after the war. Before the war, there were 1,600 undergraduates, but by 1964 this number had increased to 19,000. It is obvious that a library of the traditional type cannot cope with such a development. Although it might take some time to realize all of the plans, it is expected that the following new developments will take place.

Since the end of the last century, the special libraries of colleges and institutes have multiplied enormously. Formerly, these special libraries were considered as supplementary to the central library, but today they are used more and more independently for research work. The new relationship between special library and general library has changed the character of the latter entirely. Today much more attention is being given to the role and usefulness of the special libraries than to the value of having a general collection.<sup>5</sup> This situation has brought about a change in methods. The task of the large central library is no longer only to serve university teachers, graduate students, and undergraduates as well as possible, but to help all members of the public who are interested in or dependent upon scholarly and technical books of any kind. In order to do this, collections of open access are planned on the lines of the service provided by special and public libraries.<sup>6</sup> This new style of university library is considered a vital need for Hamburg; however, it cannot be set up at present because space and buildings are not available.

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All the various administrative problems cannot be discussed here, but it may be of interest to know that even the idea of a continuously growing central book stock has been dropped. The present book stacks of the State—and University Library hold two million volumes. However, there is a definite belief that a large central book stock does not help but actually may prevent useful research work. The problems of the central book stock may not be of immediate concern, but they have to be considered in all future plans. Considerations that have been applied up to the present only by public librarians to describe their work, now have to be used in discussions about scientific and university library work, e.g., book selection, scope of collections, choice of replacements, etc. In other words, the development of research work and the organization of universities force the scholarly library to change its methods. Thus, the relationship between the scholarly and the public library appears afresh.

The Hamburg Public Libraries were founded in 1899 under the name of Hamburger Öffentliche Bücherhallen. Responsible private citizens were able to interest the *Gesellschaft zur Beförderung der Künste und nützlichen Gewerbe von 1765*, or, as it is now known, the Patriotic Society or Patriotic Society in supporting the libraries. For decades the public libraries received only an annual state grant as a portion of their revenue, but after World War I, the state supported them entirely. Today, the libraries still retain the status of a private foundation. This early arrangement may possibly have prevented a full extension of the public library system. In the first forty-five years of existence, only eight libraries were established. This could have been due to the difficult financial and economic times that the city faced continually. The largest library built at that time had a book stock of 30,000 volumes. The character of the library system did not differ from the kind of public libraries or Volksbüchereien that existed elsewhere in Germany. It was first and foremost an institution of civic betterment, as opposed to an Anglo-American type of public library. But in one respect the Hamburger Öffentliche Bücherhallen was an exception; in keeping with the Anglo-American pattern they adopted the open access system for non-fiction, and for fiction used an adaptation of the standard "Indicator," which finally disappeared in 1943.<sup>7</sup>

The main task after World War II consisted of rebuilding a library system that had been completely destroyed. In addition, the administration of the Bücherhallen had to reorganize not only the Hamburg

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library system but to incorporate into it the libraries of the towns of Altona, Harburg, and Wandsbek. It was an extremely hard task because of the differences in tradition and organization of the institutions being incorporated. There was not a vast physical job to do, since the total book stock amounted to 130,000 volumes, i.e., one book per ten citizens. In spite of the terrible situation at that time, it was possible to achieve the consolidation rather quickly. By the time of the currency reform of 1948, the first steps to normal daily living had been taken. The Hamburg Public Libraries had finished their preparatory work and all books were available to the public on open access. Hamburg acted as a pacemaker for open access in the rebuilding of libraries and library systems in the whole of Germany. As soon as some experience in the new methods had been secured, various plans for the extension of the library system were prepared and presented to the City Council. As is usual with plans and programs, they could not be fully realized. But the desire to have such a plan showed that there was support for the idea of an efficient public library system.

TABLE 1

*Comparative Data on Hamburg Public Libraries, 1955 and 1963*

	<i>Number</i>		<i>Book Stock</i>		<i>Annual Circulation</i>	
	1955	1963	1955	1963	1955	1963
Branches	23	52	307,543	803,026	2,035,401	3,882,032
Bookmobiles	—	2	—	20,259	—	106,290
Music library	1	1	34,981	40,833	32,957	38,212
			(records 1,953)			
Supplementary stock for book stations	1	1	9,707	22,754	14,032	14,543
Book stations	61	43	44,012	35,030	214,048	102,642
Total	86	99	396,243	921,902	2,296,438	4,143,719

Table 1 shows the growth in the past few years.<sup>8</sup> Today there is one book for every two citizens. This is less than the standard for Scandinavian or Anglo-American libraries, but it represents a great advance over previous years. The problem of quality of book stock in relation to quantity cannot be discussed here. Instead it might be of interest to know that a recent proposal has been submitted to the city authorities which if it is accepted will double the book stock in a very few years.

Any scheme to enlarge the work of the Hamburg Public Libraries has to take into consideration the following difficulties. There are two

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equally important projects which cannot be financed at the same time. One is to build up the present branch libraries and place the central administration of the system in a central library. The function of the central library would be to make available both reference books and general books for home use to a public that is not being served by the University Library. In addition, this central library would be used for interbranch lending, and serve as the basis for branch organization and growth. The other important project is the building of libraries in the new housing areas and quickly growing suburbs of Hamburg. If a public library has not been part of an area scheme from the very beginning, it will not be possible to get a library in such a district for decades. Due to the priority on branch building, the planning of a central library has been neglected up to the present. The disadvantage of this decision becomes more and more visible because the number of branches is continually growing. The main project of the next city building plan, which will get under way in 1966, will be to build a central library.

Another difficulty is that Hamburg is not only a city but also a federal "Land" with small villages at its edge. Small libraries without professional staff become more and more inadequate to serve these villages. The book stock does not meet the needs of a public which is no longer the same as the rural population of former times. Because of this situation, the number of small libraries was reduced in recent years, and several of them were either replaced by bigger branches with professional staff or by bookmobiles. The same question arises in regard to the small housing areas with a population of 4,000 to 6,000 citizens which are just big enough to justify an elementary school. Present plans call for professionally staffed libraries for such areas, yet collections of 4,000 to 6,000 books cannot serve the demand of modern citizens, and they are much too expensive to maintain. In the future, only libraries of at least 16,000 volumes will be planned, which means that branches will be established only where the population is at least 10,000. The smaller housing areas will be served by bookmobiles or, in special cases, by book stations. The problem looks slightly different in regard to children who cannot be expected to walk long distances. Future arrangements call for libraries in all schools; these libraries would be set up by librarians and administered by teachers with all possible support from the public libraries. Similar schemes are being planned for hospitals and prisons. Much remains to be done, however.

Finally, not only must the scholarly libraries change their style and methods, but the public libraries will also have to find new patterns. The general trend in Germany in the first part of the century was to set up a special "German" type of library with a tendency to spiritual guidance of the user. This attitude has changed entirely since the last war. The new concept takes into account the implications of modern life and the demand of the public for information and education. Although books and periodicals on a high scientific level will always be used by specialists, it is now necessary for every member of modern society to have a basic knowledge of the results of research. This means that the public library has to serve everybody interested in any available book as quickly as possible. Without dropping their traditional fields of work, the public libraries are about to form closer bonds with the scholarly libraries. Only the very first steps have been taken in Hamburg to bring about a closer relationship between the two types of libraries. The main subject in library discussions of the coming years should be how to create a united library system in Hamburg without destroying the individual characteristics of the various different parts which make it up. Part of this project would be the training of librarians to meet the demands of general as well as specialized tasks. Although the present control of libraries by two different public governing authorities will not favor the idea of closer connections, this complication may be overcome. The most useful public service demands cooperation.

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