# A Friendly Conquest: German Libraries after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989

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## Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the development of libraries in the geographical area of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) after it joined the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1990. It briefly describes the situation of libraries in the GDR and the major changes that accompanied the unification process. It also touches on a series of three nationwide studies on reading and library-user behavior, and on library legislation and major national-planning initiatives since 1989. For academic libraries, the unification process was mainly favorable, as a structured plan and continuous funding were introduced as part of higher education development. For public libraries, the process was less structured, severely reducing a previously very dense system within a very short time. Recent library statistics indicate, however, that the integration of the two library systems has benefited the remaining libraries and left no clearly visible difference between library systems in the eastern and western parts of Germany.

## Introduction

On October 3, 1990, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), or East Germany, ceased to exist. It was not just the government that disappeared, but the whole country vanished from the map. This is one of the core differences between the German experience and that of other members of the former Soviet bloc. Other countries experienced border changes—Czechoslovakia, for example, split in two—but they did not, in many respects, vanish. The GDR's fusion with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), or West Germany, was a voluntary act that reunited a country that had suffered throughout the postwar period from an artificial separation.

Legally, the unification of the two German states was achieved when the GDR adopted the constitutional laws of the FRG and became five new federal states. The term *five new states* has since then been used to describe the territory of the former GDR, and the *old states* refers to the previous territory of the FRG. After the unification, Germany consisted of sixteen federal states. Even the old district boundaries within the GDR had vanished.

Despite the voluntary unification, the change felt to many in the east like a de facto conquest. Institutions that people had grown up with suddenly disappeared. The parliament building was condemned and eventually torn down. Street names in the east reverted to prewar names, while streets in the west whose names had changed to commemorate events like the East German uprising of June 17, 1953, remained unchanged. Many changes were positive. The Stasi, the notorious state security police, lost its position and power to terrify, but now everyone had to swear they never had any involvement with it, something that introduced new anxieties. Many professors and others in public positions, including some library leaders, lost their jobs because of association with the Communist Party, membership in which had earlier been a professional plus. Travel restrictions went away, as did many of the lines to purchase consumer goods, but healthcare and other forms of social insurance did not necessarily change for the better from the viewpoint of the poorest citizens. Perhaps the hardest change was a sense that the western Germans and others who came to help the easterners looked down on the people as lacking core workplace and management skills. For librarians, gratitude for the generous money and support they received was mixed with a suppressed, almost guilt-ridden resentment as they faced the 1990s.

## OVERVIEW: THE POSTWAR LIBRARY SYSTEM AND LIBRARY EDUCATION IN THE GDR

To understand the post-1989 situation of GDR libraries, it is helpful to understand the period from 1945 to 1989. One of the most important facts is damage from World War II. Like libraries in the west, those in East Germany suffered from the bombing. Berlin and Dresden were famously hard hit, although perhaps not significantly more than Munich and Hamburg. The damage hurt the buildings proportionally more than the collections, although clearly not all collections could be moved to safety. The Soviet occupation damaged them further through outright looting, sometimes systematic, other times just individual soldiers collecting souvenirs. Estimates of what was taken range from 1.5 to 5 million volumes (Seadle, 1996). What remained was still substantial though incomplete, and the consequences of collection policies and financial problems during the Nazi period made the gaps worse. Purchases of materials from the United States, the UK, and France required hard currencies. Works from exiled

authors or authors deemed degenerate could not be collected. Where possible, the natural sciences had priority.

A larger problem was in the state of the library buildings. Construction materials were generally scarce in the GDR, especially during the early years, and libraries were not a high priority in a society with a high degree of paranoia about the outside world. Most major research libraries had space in prewar buildings, often with serious roof or other repair problems and little room for expansion. The university library in Magdeburg, for example, quickly moved into the former cafeteria after the Berlin wall came down in order to have enough space for shelving; it also used a former bomb shelter for storage (Seadle, 1996, p. 39). The GDR's passion for centralization meant the closing of many departmental libraries in universities, but the number of smaller libraries remained large; these were partly located in independent research institutions, but were mostly factory or other workplace libraries. The good news that the GDR had libraries at, and for, every level of society and every type of institution was balanced by the bad news that these often existed in the most primitive conditions and were poorly placed to face the future. Individual librarians could do little to change this.

The GDR also had currency problems, and the authorities had perhaps an even greater reluctance to collect works published in the west that were not purely scientific. This placed East German library collections in a time-bubble that separated them from libraries in the FRG. They had some new materials that western libraries did not bother to collect, but generally, these are mainly interesting for historians of the GDR. In practical terms, the literary and social science collections in the east diverged radically from those in the west, and diverged even more when West German libraries filled gaps from the Nazi period while East German libraries did not.

Librarian training in the GDR was largely centralized in Berlin, which had the only professional library program in the country. The program had a history that went back to 1928, when Fritz Milkau became founder and director of the Bibliothekswissenschaftliches Institut at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin (as Humboldt-Universität was then called). The institute closed during the Nazi era, and reopened under the leadership of Horst Kunze in 1955 (Rohde, 2004). The school grew during the GDR period and had an active distance-learning component for people who already worked in libraries and needed or wanted further training. This component later evolved into the postgraduate distance-learning program that continues to operate as a form of executive education. Centralization was common in the GDR, and for library education, it meant that students received relatively consistent university training at a time when most librarian training in the FRG took place at non-university-level institutions with high teaching loads and no authority to confer advanced degrees.

When the Berlin Wall fell, the East German library world found itself at a short-term technical disadvantage and a fundamental content disadvantage. West Germany recognized the seriousness of both problems and provided funds to remedy them. But this had its negative side, as East German librarians came under pressure to adapt to new standards and new ways of thinking and operating. The FRG was almost relentlessly generous toward the former East Germans in ways that provided the latter with advantages that no other former Soviet client state could hope for, but such gifts never come without strings. Being the poor relative can be hard.

## LIBRARIES ON THE EVE OF THE UNIFICATION

*Public Libraries*
The GDR was often referred to as "*Leseland DDR*"—a "nation of readers." This was true in the sense that a lot of time was spent on reading as a pastime, and not only because there was a limited choice of nonprint media available as alternatives. As Dietrich Löffler (2001, p. 112) points out, from the 1970s, "fiction writing in the GDR had become a 'replacement for the public sphere' (*Öffentlichkeitsersatz*) and a substitute for the failing democratic and journalistic debate" and was a "way to articulate the tacit contradictions in society." For this reason, among others, literature received much attention.

As in many socialist states, political emphasis and support was focused more on the public-library sector than on academic libraries. This had to do with a strong impetus to educate the people (in both a general and socialist sense) and to make culture and education available to everyone, everywhere. Public branch libraries and "book issue points" were present even in the smallest settlements.

All of this resulted in an extremely dense system of libraries catering to the general public. In 1988, a public library in the GDR, operated by paid staff members and volunteers, on average served 1,174 individuals. By comparison, in the FRG, the average was 5,400 per library, if one counts public- and church-funded libraries together, which were run by paid staff and volunteers. (These calculations are based on information found in *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* [1991, p. 348] and *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1990 für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [1990, p. 386].) On top of this, there were the so-called *Gewerkschaftsbibliotheken*, which were union or workplace libraries—that is, libraries in industry and business. About 3,700 of these usually small libraries existed in 1988, 2,500 operated by paid staff. Thus the strength of the East German public-library system was definitely its high density, which literally reached the farthest corners of the country, even rural areas. Every citizen had easy access to a library. Connected to this was very good coverage in terms of staffing. Qualified librarians were available even in small libraries and

contributed much to promoting reading and the cultural infrastructure. Overall, the system, although heavily subsidized by the state, was of a standard of excellence that in some ways had never been reached by West Germany. It involved an intimate relationship with, and support for, local communities by their librarians.

The major weaknesses of the system were also highly visible by the late-1980s. These involved three things: collections, buildings, and technology. Technology in GDR public libraries was practically nonexistent. For example, the use of photocopiers was strictly limited in the country, so these were not available; neither was information technology (IT), except in the largest public libraries. Lending and cataloging was usually done manually with a card catalog, library card, and registration system. "The introduction of IT hard- and software in the public libraries of the new states has to start at zero," stated the recommendations of the inter-German working group on libraries (Bund-Länder-Arbeitsgruppe Bibliothekswesen, 1991, p. 116). Collections were large in number: the "gold standard" of two items per capita had already been met in the GDR in the early 1980s (calculation based on information found in *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* [1991, p. 348]), but they were limited to the GDR's own book production and thus excluded most international and West German authors. The result was that even small and medium-sized libraries usually held multiple copies of a limited range of titles, and kept them as long as possible. The situation regarding library buildings deteriorated during the 1980s: the state owned large numbers of buildings but could not keep up with their renovation and maintenance. The result was rent-free though often run-down accommodations for most of the small libraries within the country.

*Academic Libraries*

In the "workers' and farmers'state" that was the GDR, less attention was paid to academic libraries. The technical infrastructure in the east diverged strongly from that of the west: the GDR offered little support for automation. Michael Seadle (1996, p. 31) reported that "the Communist government gave virtually no support for library automation, but some university libraries made efforts on their own. Although none managed to establish OPACs, a few tried to automate circulation and others put together cataloging systems that made masters for duplicating cards." The infrastructure for network connections, in so far as it existed at all, needed to be rebuilt to handle the traffic sufficient to share catalogs. In terms of automation, GDR libraries in the 1990s were more than a decade behind their western counterparts. The only advantage of this situation was that they generally escaped the burden of converting legacy systems.

Thus the condition of the GDR's academic libraries was, in many respects, similar to that of the public libraries: both had high levels of

staffing, desolate buildings, and limited technology. With regard to their collections, academic libraries were strong on standard literature for students, but had large gaps in international research literature due to a lack of foreign currencies. But on the other hand, due to the centralized structure of the GDR, the basic infrastructure of its library system was, compared to West Germany's, quite homogeneous in its cataloging rules and classification systems used throughout the country—a big advantage over the many incompatible systems used in the FRG.

## THE UNIFICATION PROCESS

Clearly, the development of the library system in Germany must be regarded as a different kind of process from that of most other East European states after 1989. These states and their libraries had the need, and the opportunity, to redefine and develop their political, administrative, and educational systems autonomously; some even split up previous political entities to achieve this autonomy. The process in Germany, on the other hand, was a process of integrating two formerly independent states into a unified whole.

In the years following unification, the German political and administrative structures, which underlie any library system, underwent many changes: the establishment, mergers, relocations, and closings of higher education institutions and research institutes; and the incorporation of smaller municipalities into larger administrative units. This process severely influenced the scope, funding, and structure of academic, research, and public libraries. From June 1990 until the end of 1992, the unification process of the libraries was led by a federal/state working group, which encompassed several subgroups, the Bund-Länder-Arbeitsgruppe Bibliothekswesen. The group was comprised of librarians and administrators from all levels of service: national, state, and municipal (Bund-Länder-Arbeitsgruppe Bibliothekswesen, 1991, 1993).

### Structure and Infrastructure

Because two independent states merged during the unification, the unified Germany started out with not one, but two examples of every national infrastructure institution:

- Two national libraries, one in Frankfurt, the other in Leipzig
- The largest German library, the Prussian State Library, which had been split in two for over forty years: the Staatsbibliothek unter den Linden in East Berlin, and the Potsdamer Straße building in West Berlin
- Three library research, support, and developmental institutions, two in the GDR, one in the FRG
- Six library and professional associations, five in the FRG and one in the GDR

Each of these institutions had to find ways of merging the two or three entities involved, including combining staffs and establishing the responsibilities of their respective branches in the east and west (Wimmer, 1993, pp. 311–315). By 1992, the basics of these processes had been completed, but the internal work of merging several institutions with different traditions and cultures continued until the millennium, and to some extent is still ongoing. The reconstruction of the Prussian State Library Unter den Linden is an example.

A good indicator of the overall development of the library system in the former East Germany is the building of new libraries. The archive of library buildings (*Bibliotheksbauarchiv*) at the Central and Regional Library Berlin (2014) counts 145 new or rebuilt library buildings completed since 1998. During that time, twenty-eight of seventy-eight new public-library buildings, fourteen of thirty-four new university libraries, and thirteen of twenty-three libraries of universities of applied sciences were built in the five eastern federal states. Considering that only approximately 15 percent of the population lives in these states, their share of resources has been considerable for the development of the library system in the east.

*Academic Libraries*
The development of academic libraries has been closely connected to that of the higher education sector. During the period 1990–1995, more than thirty new universities and universities of applied science were either founded or reestablished in the new federal states ("Liste der Hochschulen in Deutschland," 2013). Usually, these institutions required either new libraries or extensions of their existing ones. There were several detailed planning papers regarding academic libraries that outlined their staffing, building, and collection development in precise terms. The papers of the federal and state working group were important for the planned and coordinated development of academic libraries in the east. A sustainable funding structure was established for the development of education—the HBFG (*Hochschulbauförderungsgesetz*)—which allowed the federal government to fund larger buildings and projects in the states. This provided a solid basis for development until the end of the millennium.

Whereas each public library had to manage on its own the transition to new technologies, academic libraries had a joint structure that facilitated the transformation. In the FRG, there existed eight computing and shared cataloging centers (*Verbundsysteme*) that provided a joint database, cataloging infrastructure, and technical support to the academic libraries of their respective federal states. Each of the new states in the east teamed up with an existing computing center in the west and thereby acquired an immediate structure and expertise.

Due to this coordinated master plan, the HBFG funding, and early team building with existing structures (*Verbundsysteme*), the development of the academic library system in the east after unification was successful. The statistical yearbook for 1990, *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1990 für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland,* counted thirty university/higher education libraries; German library statistics for 2012 indicates forty-six libraries of higher education institutions in the five eastern federal states, which are all members of a shared cataloging system and are completely modernized (*Deutsche Bibliotheksstatistik*, 2012). Table 1 shows the current situation of libraries in the federal states.

*Public Libraries*
More dramatic was the change of the public-library sector during the early 1990s. Unlike in West Germany, the GDR had de facto library legislation in the form of the Verordnung über die Aufgaben des Bibliothekssystems (BVO) (Statute on the functions of the library system), which was issued in 1968 and defined the provision of public libraries as a municipal duty. In West Germany the public libraries were, and remain so to this day in the unified Germany, a voluntary service provided by local authorities. This renders the libraries vulnerable in difficult economic times, and is a drawback for structured, nationwide development and planning. Because culture and education in Germany are the responsibilities of the sixteen federal states and the local authorities, by constitutional law the national government may not interfere with their operation. This also applies, with few exceptions, to academic and research libraries. This is a major difference from the library system that had existed in the GDR, which was centralized.

From the day of unification, the GDR's BVO library statute expired. Soon after, a large number of state-owned properties in the east were returned to their former owners or else sold to new ones. In many cases, the physical conditions of the old libraries—the heating, plumbing, roofing, or aesthetics—were unacceptable; such spaces were liabilities and closed to save rent, maintenance, and operating costs. As a result, the number of libraries decreased dramatically during the period 1988–1993. Because new statistical methods were introduced during the same time, the amount of decrease is hard to calculate precisely, but the statistical yearbook lists 2,923 public libraries for 1993 in the five new states, as opposed to some 14,000 in 1988. During the same period, 3,700 union/workplace libraries were also closed (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1995, p. 422).

Although from a modern, professional point of view, many of the smallest libraries (some often comprising only a single shelf of titles) would not be regarded as functional, still, the fact is that the change in the east's public libraries was not a planned, healthy transformation but a systemic breakdown, leaving many communities unserved. A unified strategy with

Table 1. State-level indicators for academic libraries in universities and universities of applied sciences (Germany, 2012)

| | Number of libraries | Number of students served | Inhabitants (as of 12-31-10) | Median floor space / 100 students (square meters) | Median acquisitions budget / student (€) | Median staff FTE / 1,000 students |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baden-Württemberg | 40 | 277,562 | 10,753,880 | 31 | 79 | 2.24 |
| Bayern | 31 | 325,598 | 12,538,696 | 26 | 83 | 2.22 |
| *Berlin* | 9 | 102,656 | 3,460,725 | 29 | 41 | 1.78 |
| Brandenburg | 9 | 49,039 | 2,503,273 | 63 | 66 | 3.55 |
| *Bremen* | 1 | 31,325 | 660,706 | 55 | 231 | 3.94 |
| *Hamburg* | 6 | 68,076 | 1,786,448 | 28 | 83 | 5.19 |
| Hessen | 10 | 151,058 | 6,067,021 | 51 | 121 | 4.85 |
| Mecklenburg-Vorpommern | 6 | 39,380 | 1,642,327 | 50 | 104 | 3.59 |
| Niedersachsen | 19 | 160,501 | 7,918,293 | 45 | 120 | 4.61 |
| Nordrhein-Westfalen | 35 | 582,742 | 17,845,154 | 30 | 59 | 3.22 |
| Rheinland-Pfalz | 14 | 77,178 | 4,003,745 | 34 | 47 | 2.14 |
| Saarland | 2 | 24,208 | 1,017,567 | 26 | 169 | 3.07 |
| Sachsen | 16 | 106,814 | 4,149,477 | 57 | 102 | 3.53 |
| Sachsen-Anhalt | 6 | 46,324 | 2,335,006 | 69 | 110 | 4.05 |
| Schleswig-Holstein | 5 | 47,169 | 2,834,259 | 41 | 52 | 1.89 |
| Thüringen | 9 | 52,942 | 2,235,025 | 62 | 118 | 6.11 |

Note: Shaded areas indicate the East German states; italics indicate city-states. (Source: *Deutsche Bibliotheksstatistik*, 2012.)

common political aims and planning standards, as existed for academic libraries, was absent in the case of public libraries. Between 1990 and 1992 alone, the number of librarians in the east decreased from 5,908 to 4,167, a decrease of 30 percent (Wimmer, 1993, p. 321). This process has continued ever since; in 2012, for example, statistics show only 2,900 librarians (equaling 2,100 full-time equivalents) in the eastern states (*Deutsche Bibliotheksstatistik*, 2012).

Due to its high preunification standard, after the first two years of unification the eastern library system managed to consolidate on a level comparable to the western states. In 1992, after experiencing severe cuts in funding, the planning paper *Bibliotheken in den neuen Bundesländern* still calculated 8,922 inhabitants per library in the east, as opposed to 17,085 in the west (Deutsches Bibliotheksinstitut, 1994, p. 80).

For those libraries that remained in the east, the redundant and outdated collections soon became inadequate. The unification unleashed a desire for the West German and international literature that had not

been available until then, and also for nonfiction and factual works. In this situation, a large part of public libraries' collections were, practically overnight, rendered worthless: 50 to 70 percent of all existing collections had to be replaced within a short period of time, which was beyond the capabilities of local authorities. A funding program by the national government stepped in to provide essential support in the rebuilding of public libraries and their collections. In 1991, the sum of the federal program was larger than what the acquisitions budgets of all East German public libraries had been (Wimmer, 1993, p. 323). Thus the libraries that remained were able to acquire new collections and regain the confidence of their clientele. More cutbacks ensued when the national government's support decreased during the 1990s. During the following years, incremental investments were made in libraries' infrastructure and technology, often with additional funding from European sources.

Since 2012, most libraries that have more than a certain number of volumes use either a commercial or a free Integrated Library System (ILS). Twenty-eight new public libraries were built in the five new eastern states since 1998 (out of a total of seventy-eight new buildings throughout Germany during this period), many of them notable: for example, the Chemnitz Public Library (housed in a former department store), and the new libraries in Eisenach and Luckenwalde. The eastern libraries meet the standards of the national library-rating system BIX (Bix der Bibliotheksindex, 2014), and the libraries at Dresden, Chemnitz, and Frankfurt/Oder are regularly among the top-rated ones.

A review of the current situation indicates that since unification, Germany's libraries have been fairly well-integrated (see table 2). Although the public libraries in the east have a slight advantage in terms of the number of items per capita (which may partly be due to a persistent reluctance to get rid of obsolete materials in collections), they are below average in regard to acquisitions budgets. However, there is no clear difference between the libraries in the eastern and western federal states.

*User Behavior*

The user perspective toward libraries can be seen by reviewing a comprehensive study of reading behavior completed by the Stiftung Lesen (Foundation for reading). The study, which was funded by the Ministry of Research and Education, reports on an eight-year cycle (1992–1993, 2000, 2008), and is representative of the reading behavior of the German population over the age of 14. The three installments show how the differences between east and west have gradually leveled; they also indicate that the statistical differentiation between east and west has become insignificant over the years (although it is still a factor in other areas).

In the 1992–1993 study, the focus was on the comparison between the eastern and western parts of the country. It found that the east was still

Table 2. State-level indicators for public libraries (Germany, 2011)

| Federal state | Inhabitants (as of 12-31-10) | Items / per capita | Loans / per capita | Expenditure / per capita (€) | Acquisitions budget / per capita (€) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baden-Württemberg | 10,753,880 | 1.64 | 5.82 | 14.73 | 1.61 |
| Bayern | 12,538,696 | 1.81 | 5.42 | 11.25 | 1.41 |
| *Berlin* (without regional library ZLB) | 3,460,725 | 1.20 | 5.80 | 11.63 | 1.04 |
| Brandenburg | 2,503,273 | 1.77 | 3.73 | 10.25 | 0.89 |
| *Bremen* | 660,706 | 1.07 | 6.36 | 16.79 | 1.81 |
| *Hamburg* | 1,786,448 | 1.00 | 7.88 | 17.78 | 1.88 |
| Hessen | 6,067,021 | 1.23 | 3.17 | 8.32 | 0.95 |
| Mecklenburg-Vorpommern | 1,642,327 | 1.44 | 3.09 | 9.79 | 0.94 |
| Niedersachsen | 7,918,293 | 1.34 | 3.97 | 8.80 | 1.02 |
| Nordrhein-Westfalen | 17,845,154 | 1.37 | 4.40 | 11.08 | 1.27 |
| Rheinland-Pfalz | 4,003,745 | 1.29 | 2.83 | 5.74 | 0.91 |
| Saarland | 1,017,567 | 0.85 | 1.63 | 5.26 | 0.51 |
| Sachsen | 4,149,477 | 2.02 | 5.44 | 13.58 | 1.06 |
| Sachsen-Anhalt | 2,335,006 | 1.68 | 3.00 | 9.19 | 0.64 |
| Schleswig-Holstein | 2,834,259 | 1.76 | 6.14 | 11.98 | 1.75 |
| Thüringen | 2,235,025 | 1.92 | 3.44 | 9.56 | 0.72 |

Note: Shaded areas indicate the East German states; italics indicate city-states. (Source: *Deutsche Bibliotheksstatistik*, 2011.)

a "country of readers." There were significant differences in the preferences for reading and the frequency of reading: in the east, 47 percent indicated that books were read for pleasure, and 31 percent for educational purposes; in the west, the percentages were 37 percent for pleasure, and 20 percent for education. There was also a significant difference in the use of libraries: 46 percent of the eastern population, as opposed to 34 percent in the west, said they had used a library during the previous twelve months (Stiftung Lesen, 1993, pp. 17, 64).

The second study focused on the rise of new technology and computers and their effect on reading behavior. It covered the east–west difference only in one chapter, more or less as a postscript to the 1992 study. By the year 2000, the differences in reading behavior and library usage, which had been so obvious in the first study, had practically disappeared: reading frequencies were now similar, and the difference in library usage during the previous twelve months had been reduced to 30 percent in the east, as compared to 26 percent in the west (Stiftung Lesen, 2001, p. 114).

By 2008, when the last study was done, the interest in differentiating between reading behaviors in east and west had subsided. None of the chapters and tables divided the data between the old and new states. Now, the primary focus was on immigrant populations. Nationwide, approxi-

mately 19 percent of the population said they had used a library during the previous twelve months, and 16 percent had read books for education or pleasure at least once a week (Stiftung Lesen, 2008, pp. 148, 188).

## MILESTONES AND VISIONS: NATIONAL CONCEPTS FOR LIBRARIES AND THE INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

### Library Planning and Legislation

In 1993, after four years of unification and restructuring, the library associations in Germany surveyed the assets of the library system, defined its standards, and outlined development options for the future. The report, *Bibliotheken '93: Strukturen–Aufgaben–Positionen*, detailed the plans for developing a unified library system during the next decade. It took stock of the existing system, but in hindsight the report lacked the strategic vision necessary to serve as the driver of development (Bundesvereinigung Deutscher Bibliotheksverbände, 1994).

The next strategic paper, *Bibliothek 2007: Strategiekonzept*, published in 2004 as a collaboration between the library associations and the Bertelsmann Foundation, was different in the sense that it did not take detailed statistical account of the situation in Germany so much as it collected best practices from other countries (United States, Singapore, Denmark, Finland, UK) to develop a stategic plan for the integration of public libraries into the educational system on a national level. One of the main recommendations of *Bibliothek 2007* was the need for library legislation that would enhance the status of public libraries in particular and support libraries in general (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2004). Although there were no immediate results, the demand for library legislation continued over the years and was finally realized in three of the sixteen federal states.

During the period 2003–2007, a study commission, "Culture in Germany," of the German Bundestag investigated the conditions, strengths, and challenges facing cultural institutions, artists, and the cultural economy in general. It conducted hearings with representatives from all cultural fields, among them libraries. In its final report, the commission recommended that "the federal states should regulate tasks and funding of public libraries by way of state laws. Public libraries should not be a voluntary service, but become a compulsory task" (Deutscher Bundestag, 2007, p. 132). This study, *Schlussbericht der Enquete—Kommission "Kultur in Deutschland,"* although still only a recommendation, reignited discussions about libraries on the federal level (strongly assisted by the German Library Association).

Eventually, in 2010, the federal state of Thuringia was the first to introduce library legislation, followed by Sachsen-Anhalt and Hessen. Although these three laws remain general in nature and do not mandate that municipalities must maintain libraries, they comprised the first-ever

library legislation in the Federal Republic of Germany—twenty years after the GDR's BVO library statute expired as a consequence of reunification (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband, n.d.).

*Planning the Information Infrastructure*
At the beginning of the 1990s, it became clear that the federal system was only of limited efficiency for shared infrastructure and cataloging. Since then, the number of computing centers has decreased to six, and after an evaluation by the German Research Council in 2011, the number will probably be reduced even more, with the aim of eventually having one unified cataloging database (Wissenschaftsrat, 2011). This will imply major changes for the structure of the library system.

Another strategy paper concerning a master plan for the information infrastructure in Germany—*Gesamtkonzept für die Informationsinfrastruktur in Deutschland* (Kommission Zukunft der Infrastruktur, 2011)—will significantly shape the future. It has outlined eight action fields in which a system of institutions and goals should drive change: national licensing; national hosting/long-term archiving; resolving the challenge of nontextual materials; digitization of the nation's cultural heritage; virtual research environments; open access; research data; and education/information literacy.

## The (Library) World Shakes

In terms of major setbacks, two events mark the postmillennium library history of Germany. In September 2004, a fire severely damaged the baroque reading room of the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek in Weimar, destroying approximately 50,000 volumes of heritage texts and damaging another 67,000 ("Current Situation," n.d.). The cause of the fire is assumed to be faulty electrical wiring dating back to the GDR period. In March 2009, the municipal archive of the city of Cologne, one of the oldest and most valuable archives in Europe, collapsed due to adjacent construction works and buried in mud and rubble almost 90 percent of all archival materials (Stadt Köln, n.d.). Since then, most of the documents have been recovered, but the restoration process is ongoing and some will be lost.

Both events aroused an unexpected wave of sympathy, support, and interest across the spectrum of German society. This connection to the nation's cultural heritage was felt even by those who would never have used or seen these materials. The immense emotional outpouring surprised even the librarians and politicians, resulting, for example, in the case of the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, in donations of €21 million (including major donations from the business community and support from the federal government) by 2011, when the reading room was reopened (*Wiedereröffnung Anna Amalia Bibliothek*, 2011). Both events also

highlighted the fragility of physical objects and raised issues about their physical safety on the one hand and digital preservation on the other.

## CONCLUSION

Today, almost a quarter-century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the differences between libraries in the east and west of the unified nation have effectively vanished. People under age 25 have no memory of the GDR, and for those under 35, the memories are largely those of childhood. Since reunification, the libraries in the east have had the enormous advantage of funding from one of the richest countries in the world, at a time of unprecedented changes in information and communications technology; integration was able to proceed smoothly, with few significant barriers hindering the process. It is not quite accurate to assert that today nothing remains of the GDR's library system, but what does remain is hardly more than a fading memory that, like many memories, transforms past challenges into stories of success.

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