

Observations from an Enlightening 2007 Study Tour of German Parliamentary and Government Libraries

Eileen Deegan, U.S. Department of State, International Information Programs

For me, this study tour which opened in Berlin on October 2 (the eve of Germany's national holiday celebrating its reunification), and concluded twelve days later at the renown Frankfurt Book Fair, was an enlightening experience.

Our group of ten American information professionals from diverse government and non-profit institutions traveled to some of Germany's most dynamic, esteemed, and historic libraries and archives, including the Bundestag, the Bavarian and the Dresden State Libraries, and the Stasi Records Office. Being nominated and selected to participate was a true professional honor, for which I am most grateful.

The study tour was expertly coordinated and deftly led by Evelin Morgenstern of the Initiative for Continuing Education in Academic and Research-Oriented Special Libraries and Related Institutions. Thanks to Frau Morgenstern's detailed planning, every day was educational, insightful and enjoyable. Generous support for the tour was provided by the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation, under the auspices of Acting Director Dr. Andrea [Mehrlaender](#). Also instrumental in conducting our tour was Dr. Christine Wellems, Head of the Hamburg Parliament's Information Services.

What I Observed, Learned, and Have Pondered

In the following summary, I have attempted to recount valuable and distinctive things I saw and learned about the libraries and information centers we toured. In some cases, I have noted what I think are striking differences from, and similarities to, U.S. libraries (and their parent organizations) that I have worked in or visited. I also suggest a few issues and topics that would be interesting to know more about.

German Bundestag Library, Berlin

To me, the Bundestag Library – the world's third-largest Parliamentary Library -- is one of the world's most architecturally stunning. Moreover, its artwork – the “Blauer Ring” quoting Hannah Arendt on freedom and equality, and the sculpture honoring Jewish physician and Holocaust victim, Dr. Benno Hallauer – communicates a profound message. From Library Director Ursula Freyschmidt's and our other presenters' overviews, it was equally clear that the Library's services, as well as such related services as the Subject and Speakers' Index, Press Documentation, Parliamentary Archives, and Hotline W, are world-class.

From our presenters, I learned that the Bundestag Information Services face issues similar to those facing U.S. legislative-information services, including copyright-

restrictions on article distribution and inadequate staff levels. One unique issue which would be useful to learn more about, is how the Library and other Bundestag Information Services dealt with the challenges of establishing themselves in Bonn , and several decades later, relocating to the new Marie-Elisabeth-Lueders-Haus in Berlin.

(The real challenge was the move from Bonn to Berlin. Or are you referring to the end of the Third Reich with Germany becoming a “Demokratie”? At any rate – when people think or speak of challenge with regard to the government, its always its move to the “capital”. They did not really **want** to come, quite apart from the logistics ...)

Federal Foreign Office, Political Archives and Historical Service, Berlin

This visit provided us a glimpse into German government-information issues. According to our host, Herbert Karbach, the Federal Foreign Office is unique among German ministries. While the others send their files to the federal archives, his ministry needs to know its history, so keeps its own archives. The Office’s massive, temperature- and humidity-controlled repository was filled with row after row of numbered boxes containing files. By law, every file -- including classified documents older than 30 years -- is open to the public. Documents applying to single persons, however, are opened to the public 30 years after their death.

He noted that the archive’s losses during World War II were not great, so today the Office has a rather complete heritage of German Foreign Ministry documents. From his vast storehouse, for example, he showed us a copy of the Treaty of Versailles, and the 1939 map accompanying the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union. A project to digitize multilateral treaties and put important documents on the Web is underway, he said.

Stasi Records Office, Berlin

While the focus of this Office was also archived government information – it was information of a highly notorious variety. Its holdings are the mountains of espionage records amassed by the former German Democratic Republic’s State Security Service about its citizens and West Germany. Our presenter, Chief (he is s.th. like the Head of the “Management Office” - and a lawyer) Lawyer Guenter Bormann, outlined the structure, methods and impact of the former State Security Service, and the Stasi Records Office’s mission to facilitate individuals’ access to their personal records.

Mr. Bormann and a Security Officer showed us one of the Office’s file rooms containing indexed personal records. He described the Office’s painstaking work to restore the myriad records the Stasi Agents shredded and tore up during the last months of the GDR. He said the office recently launched a ground-breaking 6,000,000 Euro pilot project to reconstruct 400 binbags of these scraps. In this project, customized pattern-recognition software and computers will piece together the documents. If successful, this technology will be applied to the 15,000 other binbags of shredded records in the Office’s storage.

Mr. Bormann noted that more than a decade after Germany opened the Stasi records, other east European countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania have finally recognized the value of opening their comparable files. Likewise, his Office has consulted with officials from other countries like Iraq, Argentina, and South Africa, who are seeking to deal with the illicit records of their past regimes. In concluding his presentation, Mr. Bormann saliently observed: “At the end of the tunnel there is some light – people choose freedom.”

German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin

In introducing the work of the Institute, our presenter underscored a funding difference between German and U.S. think tanks. In contrast to the U.S. system, in Germany it's believed that public financing guarantees think tanks' independence. Although SWP's operations are funded by the Ministry of the Office of the Prime Minister, SWP's approximately 50 researchers determine their own agendas. Studies produced by SWP are embargoed for a six-week period so that members of Parliament and the Administration may read them before their public release.

From the presentation by the Deputy Head of Library and Information Services ([Dr. Petra Galle. Nele Morkel M.A. is the name of the Chief Librarian](#)), and our subsequent tour, it appeared that the SWP Library's guiding principles resemble those of U.S. special libraries. The SWP library's mission, for example, is to give clients expedient access to scholarly, reliable information. It also strives to make the information it finds available to others via the World Affairs Online database, and to cooperate with other libraries and documentation units.

It was interesting to learn that SWP is a partner of “Vascoda” – the German Internet portal for searching scientific and scholarly information. “Vascoda,” in turn, is a major component of “WorldwideScience.org” – a new U.S. Government / British Library initiative to transform global public access to science information. (See more about WorldwideScience.org in “Building Professional Bridges,” below.)

Buergerschaft, Parliamentary Information Services, Hamburg

At her workplace in the landmark Hamburg “Rathaus,” Dr. Christine Wellems conducted an extensive briefing on the services she and her staff provide to the only part-time State Parliament in Germany. Topics covered included the monograph, periodical and newspaper collection; reference services; and the press-archive database. A lawyer who works for the Parliament's Petition Committee offered further insight by describing how the Library helps her do her work.

In addition to showing us the Library complex with its striking views of Hamburg, Dr. Wellems gave us a tour of the Buergerschaft's picturesque rooms, such as the oak-filled Plenary Session Hall, the Phoenix Room, and the Great Banquet Hall. The fact that Dr. Wellems and her Hamburg colleagues, and Frau Morgenstern conducted this session for our group on a Saturday – a non-workday -- was very impressive.

Max Plank Institute for Foreign Private, International Law; Hamburg

Likewise appreciated, was the Saturday-afternoon presentation by Dr. Holger Knudsen, Head Librarian of this law-focused Max Plank Institute. Dr. Knudsen raised the interesting point that while the Max Plank Institutes -- comprised of 80 separate research institutes -- are funded by the State, the State does not interfere. He also noted that unlike the United States, Germany does not have a National Academy of Sciences.

Dr. Knudsen said that his research library endeavors to collect topical law books and journals covering all the world's countries. However, it has problems acquiring material from Sub-Sahara African, Caribbean, and some former Soviet Union countries. We learned that the Library does not answer questions about German law, and it hosts about 1,000 researchers per year.

Saxon State Parliament, Dresden

The Dresden leg of our study tour offered a fascinating mixture of the historic and the new. Clearly, the Saxon State Parliament, which is currently in its 4th Legislative Period, exemplified one of the new institutions that we visited. Our presenter, who addressed us in the modern Plenary Hall overlooking the Elbe, discussed such issues as which political parties make up the current Parliament, the role of e-government, and the public's attendance level at plenary sessions.

Afterwards, the head of the Parliament's Library gave us a short tour of her collection, which contains approximately 20,000 books, 18 daily newspapers, and 200 current periodicals. It would have been interesting to ask her about the library's goals and initiatives, and the challenges of creating a new Parliamentary Library in 1990.

Saxon State and University Library (SLUB), Dresden

Following an exceptional, guided walking tour of Dresden's historic district, our group visited the Saxon State and University Library (SLUB), which inhabits one of the city's relatively new buildings – c. 2002.

Despite its new building, we learned from our presenter ([Manuela Queitsch](#)) that the library's origins extend back to the 16th century. Moreover, SLUB has an established program to digitize its old books, maps and special collections. One of the library staff demonstrated the process by which rare books made from parchment are digitized. Basically, a camera with automatic focus, positioned above the book, creates TIF images, whose color and contrast can be adjusted using special software.

Our visit was capped off by a tour of SLUB's Book Museum which exhibits such treasures as the Dresden Maya Codex; the "Sachsenspiegel" – the basis of German law; original music manuscripts by Johann Sebastian Bach, Richard Wagner, and Carl Maria von Weber; and the work of German bookbinder, Jakob Krause.

German Patent and Trademark Office (DPMA), Munich

Librarian and mechanical engineer Hubert Rothe, of DPMA's "Industrial Property Information for the Public" division, shared his vast knowledge about Germany's system of intellectual property protection. In describing the Office's business, he noted that DPMA's job is to give the public basic patent information, not value-added data that would interfere with the commercial vendors' products and services.

When discussing a 2005 DPMA reorganization that created separate information service divisions – one serving the public and the other serving the internal organization – he touched on a widespread marketing problem among many of today's libraries. By joining the division with an internal focus, the DPMA Library reduced the scope of its responsibilities. The librarians, he commented, failed to market themselves and demonstrate that they have the skills needed for the more dynamic division that serves the public.

Mr. Rothe also informed us about a useful tool called DEPATISnet, which allows users to search, free of charge, both German patent documents issued since 1877 and documents of several other patent offices and organizations worldwide. DEPATISnet offers a German and an English user interface and a variety of search options. DPMA librarians defined many of the tool's functionalities and contributed many ideas in its development.

Following his extensive talk about DPMA's inside operations, Mr. Rothe concluded by showing us the incomparable view of Munich that DPMA's staff can enjoy from the building's tenth-floor, outside walkway.

Max Plank Institute for Intellectual Property, Competition and Tax Law, Munich

We continued to explore the intellectual property theme during our afternoon session at this IP-focused Max Plank Institute. Head Librarian Peter Weber discussed how the 80 Max Plank Institutes (MPI), with their basic-research orientation and 1.4 billion Euro public-sector funding, fit into the overall German research landscape.

This Munich Institute is one of the six MPI that specialize in particular branches of the law. The other MPI are devoted to the natural and the biological sciences, and have produced Nobel laureates since 1948. No matter its subject focus, Mr. Weber noted that each Max Plank Institute determines its own research topic(s) and its research structure, recruits its own personnel, and manages its budget. Some among our group suggested that this is a significant contrast to how U.S. research institutions work.

Mr. Weber also made an interesting remark about the impact of German reunification on research and development. During reunification, he said, the Max Plank Institute opened institutes in eastern Germany and closed some in the west.

A senior colleague of Mr. Weber's presented a profile of the Institute's Library, which has a comprehensive collection of international intellectual property resources, as well as strong holdings in competition and tax law. The Library's main future tasks are to develop its electronic information resources including e-books and online publications.

Our presenters noted that the MPI Libraries' total annual budget for e-resources is about nine million Euros, and includes subscriptions to Lexis Nexis and Westlaw. They observed that they have had difficulty drawing the MPI scientists to their database-training sessions. Our group agreed that attracting users to training is also a challenge in our U.S. libraries.

Bavarian State Library (BSB), Munich

2008 is the Bavarian State Library's 450th anniversary, and from what we learned from Deputy Director General Klaus Ceynowa's presentation, and our subsequent tour, this multifaceted, international research library has a tremendous number of achievements and initiatives to celebrate.

Various BSB statistics that Dr. Ceynowa cited conveyed the extent of the Library's achievements. He noted that its collection is comprised of 9.25 million monographs; 50,000 current periodicals (the second largest periodicals collection in Europe); 91,000 manuscripts (the fourth largest collection in the world); and 136,000 16th century imprints (the largest collection in Germany).

He said that the scope of the BSB's vast responsibilities includes serving as:

- Bavaria's central state and archival library;
- The Working Group member of the Virtual German National Library charged with acquiring all German-language material published from 1450 – 1600;
- The service provider for Bavaria's university libraries;
- The consulting center for Bavaria's public libraries; and
- The nationwide training center for the Bavarian School of Library and Information Science.

Dr. Ceynowa detailed the BSB's initiatives that have made it a leading, innovative center for digitization. Since 1997 the Library has operated one of two National German Digitization Centers, and has completed 60 digitization projects. For its current ground-breaking project, the BSB is digitizing 37,000 German-language books published between 1518 and 1600, using a custom-designed scan robot. Staff who demonstrated this invention to us, noted that the robot can scan 1,000 pages an hour for 16th century books, and 3,000 pages an hour for 19th and 20th century books. Done manually, a human technician can scan about 600 pages a day. Clearly, this is a project that major U.S. libraries will follow with great interest.

Another digitization initiative, BSB's partnership with Google to digitize 1,000,000, copyright-free titles in the Library's holdings, was likewise of interest to our group, as some U.S. libraries have established similar partnerships with Google. Under the terms

of the BSB's partnership, the books being scanned will not leave Bavaria, and the Library will receive one of the two digital copies that Google produces. Thus, the BSB will have separate permanent access to the digitized books. Dr. Ceynowa emphasized that the Google project is just one stone in building BSB's digital library.

In addition to using digitization to preserve its collection, each year, about 200 of the BSB's books and manuscripts are restored by specialists in the Library's Institute of Book and Manuscript Conservation. During our group's visit to the Institute's workshop, a specialist discussed her techniques for restoring pages of books that will be displayed in the 450th Anniversary exhibit. One technique involves using a gossamer tissue paper made from mulberry trees, which was developed at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC – a library that several in our group are very familiar with.

On a more somber note, another group of damaged books that we saw during our tour of the BSB's stacks will never be repaired. They are some of the books that burned during the World War II bombing of the Library. As a reminder of such losses, BSB staff have called this simple, but poignant, memorial the "Corner of Grief."

Our visit to the BSB made me wonder -- What other remarkable achievements will this library attain in the next 50 years that it will celebrate on its 500th anniversary?

Bavarian State Parliament, Munich

An opportunity to see distinctive architecture and artwork, while touring a government institution, certainly enhances the overall experience. Our visit to the Bavarian Parliament – which resides in the ornate 19th century Maximilianeum building, as a tenant of the Maximilianeum Scholarship Foundation -- provided that kind of enjoyable opportunity.

To open our visit, our host showed us an informative film about Bavaria's 180-member legislative body -- one of the oldest parliaments in Europe. During our tour of the Parliament's library, whose primary users are members of Parliament and their staff, we learned that the library annually weeds its 60,000-volume collection to maintain a fairly constant size. In addition, the library subscribes to approximately 370 journals and newspapers from all Bavarian regions.

Some of us noted that among the new books on display were two timely books about women politicians -- U.S. journalist Carl Bernstein's biography of Hillary Clinton, and a German book "Macht Macht männlich?: Das Bild von Angela Merkel und Gerhard Schröder in der deutschen Tagespresse [about](#)."

In the last part of our visit we moved from the pragmatic to the aesthetic realm, as our host showed us the art-filled halls and rooms that comprise this fortunate "tenant's" workplace.

European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg, France

Distinctive architecture and a film were also components of our trip to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. Our group admired the Court's unique 1994 building that was designed by architect Sir Richard Rogers to convey transparency.

Head Librarian Nora Binder provided useful background by showing us a film and distributing a "Facts and Figures" handout that described the Court's structure, case-processing procedure, and recent judgments. Deputy Librarian Genevieve Woods demonstrated how to effectively search HUDOC -- the free, case-law database of the European Court of Human Rights.

In a tour of the Court's library, our presenters underscored its extensive, special collection in human rights law -- particularly pertaining to the European Convention on Human Rights -- and numerous comparative law and public international law materials.

By means of the film, demonstration, tour, and discussion, our presenters clarified the Court's purpose and operation. It was quite instructive for this American who is relatively unfamiliar with the European courts.

Federal Constitutional Court, Karlsruhe

Library Director Volker Roth-Plettenberg, like the Hamburg librarians mentioned above, donated valuable weekend time to brief us about his library. He offered several prefatory comments about the Federal Constitutional Court's structure and role. For instance, he identified the two types of cases the Court has jurisdiction over. One kind involves citizens' complaints against Germany. For example, a citizen could challenge the constitutionality of a law that allows online surveillance of his computer. Another kind involves disagreements between government institutions. For example, two disputing States could ask the Court to decide if the National Democrats can be a political party.

Mr. Roth-Plettenberg remarked that the Library -- which specializes in public, constitutional and administrative law; government; and contemporary history -- is the heart of information for this Court. The Library's growing collection is comprised of approximately 360,000 volumes, and about 1,300 serials—430 of which are law and social science journals from Germany and abroad.

Another strength, is the Library's archive of 1.2 million press clippings concerning the Court. A daily press digest is produced from articles published in 30 - 40 daily and weekly newspapers. The Library's main clients, he said, are the Justices' legal clerks -- though he added that some of the Court's sixteen Justice's do use the Library themselves.

Mr. Roth-Plettenberg observed that it's a "long story" why Germany's Federal Constitutional Court is in Karlsruhe, and not Berlin or Bonn. For Americans, whose highest U.S. Court is in Washington, DC, this would be an interesting story to hear in greater detail.

Federal Court of Justice, Karlsruhe

Another librarian who devoted numerous hours to our group – in both Karlsruhe and Strasbourg -- was the Federal Court of Justice's Library Director, Dietrich Pannier. During an extensive tour of his facility, he shared his insights about the Library gained during his 30-year tenure there.

His Library, which serves Germany's highest court for civil and criminal cases, is the largest court library in Germany. According to a 2005 Federal Court of Justice brochure, the Library's print collection numbers approximately 405,000 and contains practically all the relevant legal literature from 1800 to 1970. During the past 30 years, its new acquisitions have emphasized civil and criminal law literature.

The fact that some divisions of the Court, as well as a second Court Library, are located in [Leipzig](#), has impacted his collection development strategy. For instance, the Libraries have decided to keep just one copy of a title, not multiple copies. He also suggested that obtaining sufficient funding for acquisitions presents an annual challenge – likewise, something U.S. government libraries wrestle with.

Mr. Pannier pointed out that both his Library and the Federal Constitutional Court's Library maintain a combined catalog. That catalog and other Court of Justice Library information can be accessed at the Library's website at <http://www.bundesgerichtshof.de>, he said.

In a fitting closing to his presentation, he showed us a memorable stainless-steel sculpture in his building's courtyard. Inscribed on the artwork in large capital letters is this phrase – LEX INJUSTA NON EST LEX (An unjust law is no law at all).

International Frankfurt Book Fair, Frankfurt

Having heard about the Frankfurt Book Fair for several years, I opted to attend on my last day in Germany. I joined Mr. Pannier for his appointment with a representative from "Schweitzer Sortiment," a vendor specializing in print and electronic German-legal resources. The representative explained, concisely yet informatively, how German and Anglo-Saxon law differs, and he demonstrated how to search for German legal information via the database Beck Online.

The Book Fair was a gigantic event that was spread out among multiple exhibit-hall buildings. On the day I visited, 56,653 people attended. For me, the best parts were being able to see the familiar and the unfamiliar. The familiar, included the exhibit -- staffed by U.S. Embassy and Consulate information-specialist colleagues -- that displayed the State Department's public-diplomacy products, and compelling books by U.S. authors.

The unfamiliar, was the myriad exhibits showcasing books published in countries with little or no presence in U.S. bookstores. These ranged from the enormous, crowded hall

filled with German books and publications of all varieties; to the conference room with its elaborate display of Catalan literature and culture (the Fair's 2007 "Guest of Honor"); to exhibit spaces for publishers from countries ranging from Iran and Iraq to Romania and Russia.

Building Professional Bridges

What professional repercussions will the study tour have for me? First of all, as the conference planner for SLA's Government Information Division (DGI), I am drawing on ideas and material from our study tour for SLA's 2008 Annual Conference programs. Here's why.

I believe that a session about our tour, which facilitated exchanges between U.S. and German government information professionals, fits well with the Conference theme "Breaking Rules, Building Bridges." Thus, on June 17 in Seattle, a panel of study-tour participants will present their trip highlights, and discuss what information issues bridge the U.S. and Germany, and connect our respective professionals. Another DGI Conference session will explore the government-initiated, global science gateway, WorldWideScience.org – whose partners include Germany. Germany's "Vascoda" information portal is a major component of WorldWideScience.org.

Another avenue by which I hope to maintain professional connections, is through my work and association activities in Washington, DC. I look forward to meeting with German information professionals who travel to the U.S. Capital in study-tours with the Initiative for Continuing Education in Academic and Research-Oriented Special Libraries and Related Institutions, or similar programs. I am eager to reciprocate for the hospitality we received from German library colleagues throughout our tour. Their gifts of time and knowledge were exceptional.

I also look forward to continued encounters with my German colleagues working at the U.S. Embassy and Consulates' Information Resource Centers. They have a unique, impressive expertise in navigating both the German and the U.S. information worlds. Finally, I hope to keep communicating with my fellow U.S. study-tour participants – an enjoyable group of professionals.

In sum, one year ago I had no inkling that, in October, I would be crossing the bridges that this study tour led me over. Today, I can say with certainty that the many things I learned about German parliamentary and government libraries and their milieu, have made me a more enlightened information professional. Thanks to this promising start, future opportunities for strengthening our professional ties look bright.

