Five aspects of current trends in German library science

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The specialisation Library Science at the Hochschule Darmstadt/University of Applied Science Darmstadt is the newest academic program in Germany for the higher education of librarians. Five current trends in library science in Germany reflect the new "Darmstadt Model": 1. The delimitation of a specific professional field 'library' is obsolete, so it might be a chance to redefine library science "out of the spirit of information science". 2. Information science and library science become a fundamental component of scientific thought in times of perceived crises in education and comprehensive educational reforms. 3. Library science is playing a major role in the current redefinition of the function of libraries: the re-establishment of libraries as educational and cultural institutions will depend to a decisive degree on premises of educational policy. 4. The academic profiling of the profession has not been completed yet: the process of specialization and of simultaneous extension of the responsibilities of the job should be considered as an ongoing challenge. 5. Library science in Germany is no longer conceivable without international interaction.

1. Introduction

The specialisation Library Science at the Hochschule Darmstadt / University of Applied Science Darmstadt is the newest academic program in Germany for the higher education of librarians. Not until 2001 did the German Federal State of Hesse close a college that provided civil service-oriented training programs for librarians and establish an academic program at the Information Science School in Darmstadt.

These new changes have not yet been completed for alongside the new orientation of the subject there has been a continuing renewal process over the last five years. The old 4-year "Diplom" course has been replaced by a new Bachelors and Masters Program and selection criteria for new lecturers has been revised. The Department has relocated to a new well-equiped Media Campus which it shares with Media Studies and Online-Journalism.

From 2007 Library Science will be a special subject in the School of Information Science as part of the Media Faculty. Such a rapid change process necessitates a new course content. It is not only a question of organisation! The newly developed concepts must be the basis for future planning. Current trends in library science in Germany reflect the "Darmstadt Model".

1.1. Thesis 1

"The birth of library science from the spirit of information sciences": The delimitation of a specific professional field 'library' is obsolete.

Libraries, as is well known, are one of the older educational institutions. The first university chair of "Library Studies" in Germany was established in 1886 at the University of Göttingen. But although as early as 1829, the former Benedictine monk Martin Schrettinger tried to provide clear definitions to the previously "concept-free practice" in his *Lehrbuch der Bibliothek-Wissenschaft*, the "Textbook of Library Science", library studies were not able to gain the status of a discipline, but instead developed more and more into a typically German instrument of qualification for a civil-service career. The final seal seemed to have been set on this outcome with the abolition of the only West German university chair at the University of Cologne in the early Nineties of the twentieth century. Since the late Fifties, however, qualification in the field of information and documentation had been developing in parallel to, but separately from, the training programmes for librarians, which followed a path set by civil-service regulations and administrative structures. Looking back, we can hardly say there was any intensive interaction with library systems, unfortunately. This changed rapidly in the Eighties and Nineties, when almost all the colleges that provided civil-service oriented training programmes restructured their courses into integrated information, documentation, and library science courses, and now offer them as open training courses as part of that broader subject. In parallel with this, many Information Science departments were established at universities, which may be relevant to library science, depending on what emphases on communications and media studies they may have. Only at the Humboldt University in Berlin a separate university subject of Library Science can be found dating from the days of the German Democratic Republic, and the creation of political awareness for the unquestionable necessity has been a struggle for years. After six years vacancy Michael Seadle (Michigan State University Libraries) is now appointed to the professorship (Winter 2006/07).

The developments I have outlined document the general consensus that library, information, and documentation studies should be regarded as specializations within the framework of broader concepts of information science and knowledge management. This provides today's graduates with the necessary openness for a qualification in the broad field of the professions that manage and transmit information and knowledge. And in particular, it opens the subject of Library Management to a wider scientific context. Classification systems can be taught best if the teachings are not made part of the system themselves. In other words, the detached viewpoint of information science on the respective library practice must be preserved. Not only the perspectives of systems theory, but also those of social history can be helpful in this. But this meta-level in no way implies that the subject should disassociate itself from practical application or the active participation of teachers in the practice of the profession! The training of future librarians has ceased to be only the teaching of pure user skills,

however, and provides productive, broad, and application-related skills. The current restructuring of *Diplom* degree courses into bachelor's and master's degrees can be regarded as an opportunity to review the courses again from this point of view.

A topical example of the effects of a redefinition of "library management" out of the spirit of information science is the fusion of the two major professional associations, the BDB (*Bundesvereinigung Deutscher Bibliotheksverbände*) and the DGI (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Informationswissenschaft und Informationspraxis*) in 2004; the importance of this should not be underestimated. The new joint national association, the BID (*Bibliothek & Information Deutschland (BID) – Bundesvereinigung Deutscher Bibliotheks- und Informationsverbände*), has put the European project CertiDoc on its agenda which develops international standards in curricula. This convergence of the activities of information scientists, documentalists, and librarians is now such a general consensus that the major professional associations are working together on the quality and recognition of the respective training programmes [1].

1.2. Thesis 2

Information science and library science become a fundamental component of scientific thought in times of perceived crises in education and comprehensive educational reforms.

In eras of educational reforms – such as Humanism and the Renaissance, and the reform phase in German universities in the late eighteenth century – the sciences were always interested in the ordering of knowledge. These eras valued work on encyclopaedias and on the associated meta-levels of the sciences or contemporary knowledge highly. However, this encyclopaedic thinking declined rapidly in Germany as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in France and Britain towards the end of the century, in favour of the differentiation of individual sciences [2]. In the last two hundred years, interest in classifications has largely been restricted to the librarians' craft Interest in classificatory thinking rekindled in the late 1960s when Information Science took shape at universities and theoretical advances were made through the activities of research groups.

It is evident that the encyclopaedic tradition, or – to use present-day terminology – the interest in the meta-level of knowledge management declined precisely in those years around 1800 when the individual sciences first differentiated themselves as professional disciplines. As long as knowledge and science still existed in unordered, unstructured and undelimitable forms, it seemed an imperative task to find possibilities for defining and ordering them, of course. The creation of the system of scientific disciplines was associated with a separation of the individual disciplines, however. More comprehensive meta-levels of a structuring of knowledge disappeared from modern thought.

Why this short historical excursion? Because it may make us more conscious of a process that has been going on since late in the twentieth century. At the same

time as the perceived and constantly proclaimed "crisis in the educational system", which in Germany currently goes far beyond the usual wailing and gnashing of teeth over educational policy, an impressive boom of information and documentation sciences can be observed. The interest in new encyclopaedic, systems-theory, and methodological ways of thinking has been continuous for some years now. Of course, this interest is not the same as that of the eighteenth century, for its purpose cannot be to re-activate hierarchical, static world views. But the awareness of the historicity of the respective forms of organization of human knowledge has become so well established that the necessity of a branch of studies devoted to this question is no longer in doubt today. So the qualification as a librarian also involves more than the often-described handling of the growing flood of information in the individual disciplines. Rather, it involves a fundamental interest in instruments for ordering the knowledge of the twenty-first century, as well.

As concrete examples for this claim, which the short time I have only allows me to outline as a thesis, I refer you to the far-reaching changes in the types of media. The fact that, in the nineteenth century, the specialist journal replaced the eighteenth century's encyclopaedia is telling. In view of the current crisis of journals in German libraries, among other things, I would claim that scientific discourse will no longer take place by way of these publications in future, but by way of international, encyclopaedically structured on-line access to information and texts, which may still be presented under the title "Journal" in the Internet, but will hardly have anything to do with the traditional form designated by this term any more. This is only one small example of the epoch-making upheaval in the media.

1.3. Thesis 3

Library science is playing a major role in the current redefinition of the function of libraries: the re-establishment of libraries as educational and cultural institutions will depend to a decisive degree on premises of educational policy.

Let me return to the present concept of "education". Only a few years ago, "education and culture" in the sense of the tradition of "*Bildung*" that arose in nineteenth-century Germany, still had a poor reputation. In particular, the scarecrow image of the classically-educated philistine was often associated with the apparently "dead" collections of books in dusty libraries. We should think of this stereotype, dissociated from social relevance, when we read, in the strategic concept *"Bibliotheken 2007"*, with reference to the Agenda 2010, that "Education and qualifications are central factors in a sustainable economy for the country" [3].

But entirely apart from the rehabilitation of old mental associations, we should take a closer look at the definition of the "new" hope, "education". Today's library science, as I said, is concerned not only with a qualification for information and knowledge brokering, but with the definition of the role of the future intermediaries in a dynamic educational process. For today's concept of education specifically does not mean a static canon. Although the best-seller status of Dietrich Schwanitz's book *Bildung:*

Alles was man wissen muß, i.e. "Education: Everything You Need to Know", helped to reinforce the confusion between a canon of knowledge and education, education – as the root of the word indicates – is a dynamic process, the prerequisite for the productive potential of the knowledge society to bear fruit [4]. This educational process takes place not within a restricted canon, but realizes people's full potential only when they exchange ideas and actively experience a transformation of intellectual and emotional modes of behaviour [5]. Libraries – both virtual and real ones – need to be established as sites of this process in future.

Just a *single* topical concrete example for this thesis, too: on Alexander von Humboldt's two-hundred-and-thirty-fifth birthday in 2004, the series 'Die andere Bibliothek', edited by Hans Magnus Enzensberger and appearing in the Eichborn Verlag, republished his five-volume *Kosmos* with the atlas, and two other Humboldt editions. This publication is of interest in this context, because the risky publishing project was incorporated in a lively educational programme of the most modern form [6]: festivals, banquets, lecture tours, and a variety of events in bookshops, museums, planetariums, and observatories (unfortunately, I did not find any libraries) accompanied the publication. The embedding of this major project in educational policy is shown even more clearly, however, by the committed group of supporters, which ranges from the film-maker Alexander Kluge to former Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer. It was planned to donate the expensive publication to specially gifted students entering universtiy. Volker Breidecker posed the question in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [7]: "But what will happen in the future to all these young people inspired by the spirit of Alexander von Humboldt, when they, equipped with gifts of his works, cheerfully enter the halls of the universities which were once committed to the ideas of his brother Wilhelm, and there fall into the hands of professors who were trained in the education-hostile Seventies?" Let us hope that these apprehensions do not come true for our students of library science . . .

1.4. Thesis 4

The professionalization of the profession has not been completed yet: the process of specialization and of simultaneous extension of the responsibilities of the job should be considered as an ongoing challenge.

Of course, the professionalization of information and media studies went hand in hand with specialization. Critical voices have already been raised to warn of the narrow perspectives of "radio-audience behaviour scientists" or the like. But it is not easy to find a way out of the dilemma that professions that are constantly differentiating and becoming more complex require corresponding specialization of the university courses. In Germany, librarians still often encounter surprise – with no denigration intended at all – among people in related fields that it is possible "to study that sort of thing at university at all". Such problems are probably unknown to our professional colleagues from the USA or the Scandinavian countries, since information professions there have a different social standing.

One way out of the apparent contradiction between specialization and profession-alization thus begins with intensive lobbying for social recognition of the librarian's qualifications. Another objective must be to *enable* librarians to specialize. In other words: on the one hand, the expansion of the field described should not lead to a global meta-knowledge that has lost touch with our occupational practice. And on the other hand, a narrow training for specialized individual qualifications is not forward-looking. In many libraries – although far from all in Germany! – following these two objectives corresponds to today's professional practice: the integration of departments that used to work separately into effective project-based work requires flexible personnel who are open to more than *one* specialization. It is to be hoped that decades of work restricted to one defined qualification will soon be a thing of the past in German libraries, too. This does not means that extreme, high-quality specialization will become superfluous! It is precisely their openness, the overview over the field, and the qualification for individual tasks based on projects and case studies, that will make graduates competent to perform the more and more numerous special services in the libraries of the future.

1.5. Thesis 5

Library science in Germany is no longer conceivable without international inter-action.

One would hope that this final thesis is already a matter of course, about which nothing more needs to be said. But even though the subject matter of today's fields of information and knowledge management – that is, the international nature of sciences, the internationally accessible databases, the global infrastructure of the international organization of knowledge, etc. – necessarily make them base themselves on such a wider perspective, it is worth reminding ourselves that the training within the career, tailored specifically to the German civil service (see Thesis 1), was less internationally oriented, of course. Accordingly, we see today a change in the librarian's professional practice that may be linked to the hand-over from one generation to the next. This change relates both to an international exchange of ideas about library development and to the specific, internationally oriented, work in the particular library.

To document this thesis, I refer you again to the study '*Bibliotheken 2007*', which was initiated by the professional associations and the Bertelsmann Foundation. The goal of this project is to make the future potential of libraries in Germany for the knowledge-based society clear. The method is interesting, namely developing the definition not only by means of an analysis of the existing situation, but also from best-practice examples from the USA, Great Britain, Scandinavia, and Singapore. Here also, particular attention is paid to the integration into educational policy, the clear definitions of responsibilities, and the infrastructures for co-operation and networking [8]. Apart from this ongoing study 'Bibliotheken 2007', one can indeed claim that today, no library in Germany can launch innovative projects without an exchange of information with libraries in these model countries.

While only a few years ago, the IFLA [9] was for many librarians (that is in Germany) a somewhat remote opportunity of exchanges for a select few, its individual bodies and sections are now being made more and more use of, in view of the urgently required co-ordination even in everyday practice – and not just since the IFLA congress in Berlin in 2003. Internationalization is also taking hold in the cultural work of libraries. The task of maintaining international collections has long been a firm component of the library world; now, public libraries in particular are making intercultural dialogue a central function of the events they hold [10].

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, let me return to the first thesis. This international perspective will also be very helpful for the self-definition of the Information Science departments in Germany. At the same time as it was established as an independent university subject, it was, and is, threatened by expectations from political circles that the recently departments should merge with the relatively new Computer Science departments. It is not a question of unproductive territorial disputes that would only fence us in again [11]. Information science is only conceivable in close co-operation with computer science and information technology – but in a co-operation that should not imply being swallowed up or brought down to a lowest common denominator. A look overseas, at the impressive institutional strength and independence, as well as the social relevance, of information science research and training establishments in the USA, can be very helpful here; although, of course, the autonomy of the field must be justified not merely by this example, but again and again by the results of the research and the success of the training [12].

References

[1]   cf. Letzte BDB-Vorstandssitzung, *Bibliotheksdienst* **38**(7/8) (2004), 855.
[2]   cf. Stichweh, Rudolf, *Zur Entstehung des modernen Systems wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen: Physik in Deutschland 1740–1890*, 1st ed., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984, 7–14.
[3]   http://www.bibliothek2007.de/x_media/pdf/strategiekonzept_kurzfassung.pdf.
[4]   cf. Podak, Klaus, Reisen durch die Welt zu sich selbst: Wie der Mensch zum Menschen wird; Plädoyer für eine Neubewertung des Begriffs Bildung. *SZ am Wochenende*; supplement to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27–28 April 2002.
[5]   ibid.
[6]   www.humboldt-portal.de.
[7]   Breidecker, Volker, Raus aus Schloss Langeweile: Unter der Flagge Alexander von Humboldts nimmt eine tollkühne Bildungsflotte Kurs auf die Feste PISA, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* **19** Aug. 2004.
[8]   http://www.bibliothek2007.de/x_media/pdf/best_practice_recherche.pdf.
[9]   International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.
[10] cf. Kinder, Sabine and Lindner, Margareta, Die Münchner Stadtbibliothek im interkulturellen Prozess: Veranstaltungsarbeit und Medienangebot im Zeichen des lebendigen Dialogs, *BuB* **55**(12) (2003), 748–751.

[11]   Fifteen years ago, Rainer Kuhlen already formulated this impressively for the University of Konstanz. Cf. Kuhlen, Rainer: "Lehre und Forschung der Informationswissenschaft an der Universität Konstanz", *Grundlagen der praktischen Information und Dokumentation: Ein Handbuch zur Einführung in die fachliche Informationsarbeit,* ed. Marianne Buder, 3rd revised edition, DGD Publications, vol. 9, Munich: Saur, 1990, pp. 1073–1074.

[12]   vgl. ebda.