

Übersetzung aus dem Deutschen

**Leipzig memorandum – the government library in the age of
electronic information**

Leipziger Memorandum – Die Behördenbibliothek im Zeitalter elektronischer Information

APBB

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LEIPZIG MEMORANDUM

THE GOVERNMENT LIBRARY IN THE AGE OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION

ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE APBB
AT THE 2ND LEIPZIG CONGRESS FOR INFORMATION AND
LIBRARIES

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The aim of this memorandum is to explain the responsibilities held by and challenges facing the more than 1000 government libraries in the Federal Republic of Germany as parts of modern authorities. Government libraries may vary in size, ranging from small libraries, such as court libraries, which are managed by only one or two librarians, to larger libraries with structures that allow work to be shared (e.g., the library of the German Bundestag). But they all have the same function within their authorities.

This function is described and the ratio between printed and electronic information analyzed. The responsibilities government libraries have with regard to providing information professionally via the Internet and in E-Government are set forth. An illustration is given of how government libraries can enhance their capacities themselves through co-operation and networking and how this capacity can be applied to optimise the provision of information for authorities.

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1. Government libraries – Professional information services for administrative, judicial and political authorities

*Economic efficiency:
Basic requirements
are met on the spot*

Government libraries provide all the information their authorities need on the spot. They provide the information required for daily work processes, strategic decisions and statements in day-to-day political business immediately.

The jobs of acquiring and incorporating media and making them available at the workplace, of circulating journals, of copying and scanning documents on the basis of tables of contents and of borrowing and lending are all done soon after a request has been submitted (fast and professional library incorporation; immediate availability with no long transmission and transportation routes, direct delivery by couriers). Special features are the library's integration in the structures of the administrative machinery and the direct contact it has with the customers, i.e., its authority's staff and executives.

Government libraries are run by information specialists.

Without a government library

- an authority's staff have to spend their working time looking for information instead of devoting their attention to the specialist jobs they are supposed to do so; what frequently seems easy at first and presumably can be done on the side often turns out to be a time-consuming chore that only information specialists can manage quickly and economically (keyword: information competence);
- several employees often look for a solution to the same problem; the cost of each search performed by the employees themselves remains the same so, altogether, it increases in linear fashion with each search;
- information is gradually obtained in informal ways: information is forwarded or ignored on the basis of incidental relationships and not on the basis of content and requirements;
- information is lost due to a lack of knowledge of the sources, stocks and research techniques, so that the authority runs the risk of ignoring work results achieved elsewhere, "of reinventing the wheel" – in contradiction of the basic budgetary rule of cost-effectiveness and economy;
- the amount of time required for further training and research increases considerably due to the need to make each employee an information specialist – an uneconomical process.

With a government library

the following central services can be provided:

- A stock of literature and media can be established and managed
A stock of media can be built up to match each authority's profile: published literature, "grey literature" that does not appear in bookshops and is ordered or exchanged free of charge by the library (publications, expertises, conference proceedings, etc.), official documents, books, loose-leaf publications, journals, law and regulation gazettes and other media.
- Information can be provided at the workplace
Professional journals, law and regulation gazettes and other ongoing publications can be delivered on a rotary basis straight to workplaces. Literature that is needed all the time at workplaces, e.g., specialist legal commentaries, can be made available on a permanent loan basis and kept up to date by the library. This information can be provided both in paper form and through access to electronic documents and databases.
- Knowledge of information technologies can be conveyed
By testing new offers and undergoing schooling and advanced training, users can be introduced to the latest information technologies. This know-how can be used in other administrative and decision processes.
- Literature can be acquired from other libraries
Being a partner of local or national library associations, the government library can acquire books and material that are required ad hoc in addition to the basic stock but do not need to be purchased by borrowing them.
- Information can be found and forwarded
Research can be carried out using printed and electronic media, in databases and on the Internet. Essays, books, commentaries, expertises, facts, statistics, court decisions etc. can be found.
- Profile services can be provided
A government library does not have to wait for information or documents to be requested. Each is fully familiar with its authority and the specialist functions it performs. So it can act on its own initiative and ensure that selected users receive the specialist information they need. At the same time, it can use this close contact with its users to find specialist information and documents that are produced at its own authority or at related ones and to expand its stock of printed and electronic material. The library can therefore be seen as an authority's "eye" and "memory".

- Electronic documents

Government libraries increasingly collect and compile electronic documents that are relevant to administration. These documents are made available permanently and reliably on document servers and are therefore protected from becoming lost on the Internet or Intranet.

Information and working patterns geared to the authority

The way an authority works (the way it prepares for appointments, political votes, conferences and examination board meetings, etc.) determines when the library is open and so, in turn, when the authority's employees and decision-makers can access its supply of information.

This effective way of finding and forwarding information creates synergy effects and helps modernise the administration: it speeds up work processes. Economising on a library's supply of material or staff – the providers of this service – would therefore be counterproductive. Having to interrupt a work process because of the need to first wait for information that is urgently required results in personnel and follow-on costs that are far higher than the savings achieved by not acquiring, for example, a copy of a legal commentary that is urgently needed in the administration.

Government libraries are therefore a rationalisation investment with a future!

Savings should not be made by spending less on libraries, but by investing in efficient libraries

2. Savings possible with electronic media?

*Printed and
electronic media
side by side*

The issue concerning the future of government libraries is sometimes reduced to the radical technological developments taking place in digital media.

However, the change in the media landscape is not leading to an old medium being replaced by a new one, but in media overlapping one another, supplementing one another and intermixing with one another.

Most information is still only available in printed form. An alternative is only possible with some information, and in this case the decision as to whether to use the paper or the electronic version depends on the way an authority works, the problem at hand and the workplace.

What are the strengths of *paper*?

A book can be used without any aids, without electricity, a computer and software. It does not need to be protected against system errors, viruses and hacker attacks. It does not require a license or password. It is three-dimensional, with several books being able to be placed side by side to compare individual passages, can be read anywhere and is not bound to any one particular workstation. It is possible to leaf through a paper document a lot faster. Pages can be glanced over and it is possible to work a lot faster on two or more documents at the same time than to bidimensionally scroll the pages of an electronic document on a screen.

On the other hand, the *electronic medium is unbeatable* when it comes to searching for specific information in large amounts of data from various sources. A disadvantage of the electronic medium, however, is the varying quality of the search results, which still need to be looked at and assessed.

The online version of an electronic medium can be much more up-to-date than the printed version. The “hyperlink” enables the user to be linked with other documents or to follow chains of legal quotations. *More than one* user can access the same document at the same time.

*Processing and
research costs
with
electronic media*

However, it is important to realise that many electronic information products are divided into packages or modules combining important data with unimportant material. Some data on the same subject are also distributed among a variety of modules, and this results in a product and price structure that is difficult to understand. The costs for purchasing electronic media often exceed a government library’s limited purchasing budget.

Court libraries are faced with a special problem: The Internet commentaries, journals and loose-leaf material available only cover the current legal status. Courts of appeal in particular (district courts, higher regional courts and the highest courts of justice) depend again and again on commentaries that have an older legal status, i.e., previous editions. It is not possible at this stage to carry out research

into legal facts, i.e., to access the wording of legal motives for processing old cases (e.g., references back from the court of appeal or pendency over a period of several years) using electronic media alone.

Electronic media also have to undergo processing in a library. Availability, accessibility and topicality have to be checked regularly and, if necessary, be compared with the license.

*Electronic media
not easier to use*

In addition, electronic media as such are not easier to use, as for example, the recent “Stefi-Studie” (<http://www.stefi.de/>) of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research emphatically proved. Only users who command extended research techniques and constantly practice them can exploit the full potential of the electronic information available. Users who only occasionally do research work generally have to invest more time and therefore incur higher costs than an information specialist. An information specialist uses all the information available, knows various database structures and contents, commands the syntax of the research language and keeps informed about the latest developments through advanced training.

While an increasing number of reference works and compendia of laws will only be available in electronic form in future, journals (to a slightly decreasing extent), commentaries and books in which not only facts can be found, but scientific connections are also developed, will continue to exist in paper form.

For full information to be provided, printed and electronic forms must be available side by side. A government library must even today acquire and provide both forms. Particular attention must be paid to archiving and building up a library’s stock. Will the purchased data carrier still be readable in years or decades to come or will the hardware available at the time no longer be compatible? Will it still be possible to access older volumes of a journal if an online subscription is cancelled or a publishing company becomes insolvent?

3. Navigare necesse est – obtaining information on the Internet

Unless online research is done professionally, only a tiny fraction of the information is usable

One of the latest challenges is to ensure *reliable* use of the ever-growing amount of information on the Internet.^{*)}

When research is being carried out into topics of personal interest, chance, loss of information and redundancy hardly matter, but in the case of research into a specific subject, this enormous amount of data and its high level of volatility can cause problems.

- What starting points, documents or search words are appropriate?
- What kind of search strategies should be used?
- How can the credibility, authorship and suitability for quotation of the information found be assessed?
- What legal effects apply to official sources (compendia of laws)?
- Could it be that official information will only be distributed in digital form in future?
- Is there any duty to consult the world-wide web as a source of information (“duty to browse”)?
- What different sources must be used for checking or verifying information?
- Is the information significant or irrelevant?

^{*)} The study entitled “How much information? 2003” carried out by the School of Information Management and Systems of the University of California, Berkeley <http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info-2003/internet.htm>, determined the following figures regarding the volume of the Internet: Surface Web (static websites) 167 terabytes and the Deep Web (websites that are created dynamically from databases when selected) 91850 terabytes (1 terabyte = 10¹² bytes, for the sake of comparison: 10 terabytes make up the printed holdings of the biggest library in the world, the US Library of Congress in Washington). The amount of data, information and documents is still growing tremendously. However, even the most extensive search engines have only indexed about 16% of the information available on the Internet, and users only see a fraction of this percentage, i.e., only the first few pages of the search result. Moreover, the ranking or rating of the first pages according to relevance is frequently distorted as a result of advertising or manipulation. As new pages are added, others disappear, and documents disappear as institutions revamp their presence on the Web. This disappearance of data, just like the appearance of new information, is not necessarily to be blamed on the scientific production flow alone but also on fashions and momentary trends. There is no control of the quality of the contents and the authenticity of the digital documents and there is no guarantee that the documents will be permanently accessible. The information and documents offered by some providers can be of high quality, whereas those furnished by others can be out of date, incorrect or poorly edited. Incorrect data can be provided deliberately (for example, where the provider wants to prevent users from visiting other websites by faking wrong information), out of negligence or entirely by mistake. False information can be provided due to negligence on the part of the provider simply because the original connection, background or legal foundation has changed and the Internet site in question has not been updated. This life cycle of information varies from website to website and cannot be predicted.

- Is the information credible or incredible?

Equipment and further training a prerequisites for providing information in a professional manner

So when it comes to complex specialist research that goes beyond normal “surfing” for information on the Internet, there is still a need for information to be found, processed and provided professionally by government libraries. The principle in this case is the same as with the normal provision of information: research work by end users is time-consuming and requires an effort that increases in linear fashion when several people are doing research into the same subject at the same time. Due to the fact that the information cycle on the Internet is so fast, minor learning effects experienced by the end user become outdated after an extremely short while.

The government library should therefore be equipped with high-quality technology and be in a position to search the information sources on the Internet in every possible way and continue processing them on a PC. A personal e-mail and Internet connection for receiving requests, researching and passing on information forms part of the basic equipment of a government library. Continuation training should be provided to ensure that its staff remains competent.

4. Data, information, knowledge in E-Government

Incorporating government libraries into E-Government as a central element

The modernisation of the administration that is taking place as part of the E-Government programme is affecting all administrative activities and the political processes associated with them. It not only demands that highly intensive use be made of information technology, but also that the subject matter it transports, i.e., information and knowledge (information gathered from experience) be organised, stored and used in a better manner:

- from the outside inwards
- from the inside outwards: data and documents must be published for public reference
- internal organization: staff knowledge must be processed to form accessible information.

Government libraries know how to handle information and knowledge both in formal terms and in terms of contents (formal registration, use of keywords, abstracts and classifications to disclose contents; databases and the retrieval of information through research). The effective modernisation process towards E-Government should therefore involve the incorporation of the government library as one of the central elements of an authority.

There is far more to processing an authority's own digital documents than simply archiving them as prescribed. The formal registration and transfer of data to other authorities together with the metadata that describe the contents and the delivery of compulsory copies can therefore be one of the main responsibilities of a modern government

library. As a digital or electronic library, it functions both inwards and outwards as a means of securing digital contents, guaranteeing access to the information despite the constant changes in website designs.

5. From inter-library co-operation to networking

Co-operation ensures a greater supply of information

As a government library usually has only a very limited stock of specialist material, inter-library co-operation is a must. This co-operation takes place locally and nationally and involves borrowing and lending, sending copies – in digital or paper form – and providing help in looking for information.

Proceeding from their local strength, government libraries have started to use Internet technology to link their catalogues and digital documents or to post a joint offer in an Internet portal. This networking is particularly useful since government libraries are technically heterogeneous. It also provides users from the authorities the opportunity to find their own way around the information on offer if ever they have to.

General libraries do not recognise or understand how authorities work

In contrast to this, some public libraries, regional libraries or general administrative offices have taken the initiative and centralised the services of the government library under the roof of a general library.

A typical feature of this way of thinking is the call for “incorporating” and “coordinating” government libraries and for providing or creating an office that is responsible for this incorporation. Advocates of this assume that investing in means of acquiring books and journals could yield substantial savings. They fail to see, however, that most of the media cannot be made available to the general public because the actual work of an authority must not be hindered, and most documents must be immediately at hand at the workplace all the time or always available in the library.

They also fail to understand that general libraries confine themselves to lending their media and information out of their media supply and otherwise assume that the users do the rest of the work themselves, while documents are delivered to the workplace and information is also provided quickly over the telephone and in written form. Providing and preparing information are elements of the main responsibility of a government library.

The implementation of such a concept – which preferably provides for just one copy of each book to be kept in the library for legislative authorities, ministries, lower-level offices, municipal authorities, courts, the public, professors, students and school pupils (in the interest of minimising purchasing costs – would cause deadlocks in the supply of information and delays in work processes due to the

time it would take to transport the material required and the time users would have to wait.

In the interest of using tax revenue economically and cost-effectively, the ensuing poorer results and considerably higher costs must be considered unacceptable.

The administrative and personnel costs involved in providing an information service are not the only significant factors that need to be considered when assessing the activities of a government library.

Criterion: Cost of the authority's product

As the working hours of the authority's staff who use the services provided by the government library are included in the cost accounting for a product, the decisive criterion is this: To what extent is the cost of an authority's product reduced by the services of a government library in comparison to a work process in which staff obtain information on their own or work with information that is faulty or outdated, so that appropriate consequences arise for the quality, correctness and legal security of the results?

The concept of centralising all information services despite their differences is based on an outdated idea from the 1970s - more than a quarter of a century ago – according to which a comprehensive information center based, last but not least, on the capacity of a large computer should be established. In practice, however, an information landscape featuring a variety of libraries has proved its worth. Alongside large and medium-sized libraries, libraries that are run by only one or two librarians (known as one-person libraries [OPL]) are a supporting pillar of the information structure. Electronic networking enables this information landscape to be used effectively. "Incorporation" is achieved when a user clicks his mouse and not through centralisation!

The government library is an integral part of its authority. Services, working patterns, opening hours and, last but not least, a continuous personal exchange with the authority staff enable a special information function to be performed that cannot be assumed by an external "information center" that is not familiar with the authority in question.

6. Further developing the responsibilities and competencies of government libraries!

The government library as a competence centre for providing information

The techniques for compiling, saving and retrieving information are developed further by government librarians independently, critically and in accordance with practical needs.

However, the way in which this specialist knowledge and these techniques are used to deal with information depends on the position, responsibilities and competence of the government library and the amount of room it has to make decisions.

In order to optimise the provision of information for authorities, account should be taken in the planning process of the following fact:

A government library is a competent service provider for managing an authority's knowledge and so work should continue on developing its responsibilities and function.