

A new approach to library services to multicultural populations in Germany

Dr. Volker Pirsich
Stadtbüchereien Hamm/Westfalen /
Hamm/Westphalia, City Libraries

Premises

Germany does not have a long tradition in multicultural library activities, although the country started to become an immigrant nation in the early 1960s, when lots of workers from the Mediterranean countries settled in Germany to work here for a couple of years.

Several of the terms used in this first sentence have to be explained:

- The first immigrant groups came from Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the former Yugoslavia; nowadays the by far biggest group is of Turkish origin.
- The supposition that the working immigrants would stay only for a couple of years proved to be wrong; they stayed and have been living in Germany now up to the third generation.

A decisive step was made in the 1990s when lots of people of German origin but with Polish, Russian and Romanian nationality migrated to Germany in the course of the breakdown of the so-called iron curtain. To a great extent these immigrants had only vague ideas of life in Germany and had to learn the German language as well as German customs. Even if they intended to, not few still preserve their traditions

The third and final step was the large number of immigrants who moved to Germany in the course of ecological disasters and civil wars all over the world. In this context we can look at the civil wars in former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Eritrea and, of course, we have to consider lots of immigrants from Black Africa.

We have to face the situation that a country which was to a great extent homogeneous up to the end of the Second World War has become a diverse society in which - differing from region to region and from rural to urban areas - the percentage of people with a migrant background is 25% average, with higher percentages in big cities such as Frankfurt on the Main where nearly half of the population are migrants.

Of course public libraries - especially the ones in the big cities - tried to take into account that new target groups were arising with the upcoming migrant population and started collections in the migrant languages but, in effect, this was only an initiative of individual libraries and librarians and never turned to become a national initiative. In fact, we have to admit that after a first phase of social optimism concerning the integration of migrants into the German society and a second one, in which the advantages of multiculturalism were widely discussed, Germany stepped into a third phase: starting from the new millennium a sceptic perception concerning the relationship between original Germans and the migrant population rose considerably. This was due to the fact that parts of the migrant population with modest abilities in German and with modest education, became a sociological problem. Problems such as unemployment, radicalisation, criminal and other

prejudices spread out over influential parts of the German society and made it necessary to deal with not only multicultural but also intercultural affairs. Interculturality became one of the major topics in German politics and one of the most important issues became that of learning German in order to be an adequate member of the German society on the one hand, and preserving the migrants' mother tongues on the other hand.

This was the issue when public libraries also became aware that the migrant groups could and would become a more relevant target group.

Of course it would be too simple to claim that German libraries have dealt with intercultural issues only for the last five years, there are some influential big public libraries in which interculturality has been one of the daily tasks for decades. Examples are those in Frankfurt on the Main, Nuremberg and Stuttgart. A certain breaking point was Katrin Sauermann's diploma thesis "Incentives from abroad for multicultural library management in Germany" (Stuttgart, 2005). This thesis focussed upon what was happening in many neighbouring countries concerning multi- (inter-)cultural management (quite a lot, at least partly because of national legislation in these countries) and what was going on in Germany (hardly anything; and all that could be recognised was due to individual achievements since Germany does not have any library legislation at all).

A new panel "Intercultural Library Management" in Germany

It was in winter 2005/2006 when the German Library Association (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband) and its section 1 (which is formed by the public libraries in cities with more than 400,000 inhabitants) became aware that there was an urgent need to deal with intercultural affairs. In fact, the German Library Association made an announcement to form a panel of experts that should give incentives to the German professionals.

It could be expected that mostly librarians from section 1 libraries applied for this forthcoming panel and, four of them have been working in libraries which had been focussing on intercultural library management for a lot of years (Frankfurt on the Main, Nuremberg, Stuttgart and, in addition, Hamburg where new initiatives were prepared). Only one - your speaker - is working in a midsize town with fewer than 200,000 inhabitants. What made me a suitable candidate for the panel was the fact that I had quite a lot of experience in international affairs as a former member of the International Network of Public Libraries (driven in the 1990s by the Bertelsmann Foundation) and at least some knowledge of what was going on abroad, achieved by several library visits in well developed countries such as Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Singapore. I accepted to become the chair of the new panel that has been working now for just one year.

It was clear from the very beginning that it would be Sisyphus' task to develop new incentives for intercultural library management serving all kinds and sizes of libraries in Germany. The first decision was to focus only on public libraries. The second was to choose capable persons who could serve the on the panel as guests. We decided to invite people from the following spheres:

- Katrin Sauermann, the expert now working in New Zealand – mostly as a virtual guest
- one member from the polytechnics for librarianship
- one member from small libraries

- one librarian with a migrant background
- one member from the Goethe Institute
- one member from a Swiss agency dealing intensively with intercultural affairs.

In total, the panel now consist of 11 persons who meet five times a year to:

- discuss emerging trends
- distribute new tasks to the members and
- talk about the results of former tasks that had been disseminated to members of the panel before the meeting.

The members of the panel and the guests were aware of the fact that Germany would not have national library legislation, not even on the long run. So there would not be any possibilities to develop obligatory plans, key figures and whatever else could be defined by legislation – the only way to proceed would be to develop a modular system of devices and offerings of which the public libraries in Germany could benefit. This could become a very difficult task without any commitment of public libraries of all sizes and all kinds of aspiration levels.

During the first meeting the panel agreed upon strategic aims as well as operational long-term and short-term objectives. These were fixed in a strategic paper published under the URL of the German Library Association (<http://www.bibliothekerverband.de/ex-interkulturell/ziele.html>), for the time being only in a German version (English version projected). Most important at the very start of the panel's work was the close link to IFLA Section 32 with whose publications the members of the panel were familiar.

In the meantime I had the possibility to speak about the connections between the German panel and the IFLA objectives concerning intercultural library management on a seminar in Berlin (to be published in early 2008).

Let me give you a short overview on the strategic aims and the long- and short-term objectives.

Strategic aims and the long- and short-term objectives

1. Strategic goals:

Establishment of intercultural methods as integral part of everyday library work in Germany.

Establishment of an "Intercultural mainstreaming" profile in all areas, ranging from media purchase to personnel policy.

2. Operative long-term objectives:

Successive approximation of intercultural library work in Germany to international standards; these should include:

- Installation of a German equivalent to the "Danish Library Centre for Integration" (former "Invandrerbiblioteket") or to the Swedish "International Library" ("Internationella biblioteket"). Here we think less of a newly installed library with an own building and own structure but more of a cooperative acquisition model, in analog to the special collecting field program of North Rhine-Westphalian metropolitan libraries. Media are to be collected in at least ten different languages, representing those mainly spoken by new immigrants and resident foreign nationals. The media shall be lent singularly or *en bloc* to

interested libraries (or persons). Of course such a program can only be realised with significant long-term third-party funds.

- Installation of multilingual portals for migrants, that in future will be found under the URL www.interkulturellebibliothek.de. Leading examples exist for instance in the Scandinavian Countries Denmark (www.finfo.dk), Finland (www.infopankki.fi/) and Norway (www.bazar.deichman.no), as well as in Great Britain (www.multikulti.org.uk/) or in Australia (www.openroad.net.au).
- Installation of foreign or multilingual specialists in German public libraries, to serve the growing group of users with migration backgrounds.

3. Operative short-term objectives:

- Development of a multilingual library guide for the German speaking community (see below)
- Promotion of a growing number of bi- und multilingual children's and picture books in the German market beyond the standard languages English, French, Italian and Spanish
- Identification and presentation of a selection of best practice examples for intercultural library work in German libraries, especially in the areas supporting or teaching programs to children and adolescents and also cooperation with partners (local and beyond).
- Organisation of a regular exchange of resources and purchase data, title lists, annotations (or the like) to facilitate procurement

The operative short-term goals will be continually adapted by the panel of experts to the needs of German libraries and according to constantly monitored foreign developments.

Where is the focus at this very moment?

The panel decided what could be the most important migrant languages on which we should concentrate in our work. The following languages were identified – partly because of the amount of speakers in Germany, partly because they are spoken in the neighbouring countries, partly because of the fact that they are used as common languages for groups of migrants:

Albanian

Arabic

Bosnian (+ Croatian + Serbian as closely related languages spoken in former Yugoslavia)

Chinese

Danish

Dutch

English

French

Greek

Italian

Japanese

Kurdish (in all German statistics integrated into Turkish)

Persian
Polish
Portuguese
Russian
Spanish
Tamil
Thai
Turkish
Vietnamese.

In total, we decided to declare round about 20 languages as highly relevant for our efforts concerning intercultural library management.

Where are the fields in which we started working?

1. Highly relevant for all public libraries is a “welcome portal”. We agreed upon a simple text that addresses new library customers with a migrant background and poor knowledge of German.

The prototype of the text was developed in Switzerland and could be transferred to Germany to a great extent; only some Swiss idioms had to be replaced.

The text can be used modular, fitting the needs of the individual library.

Examples of patterns taken from the text:

Registration

1. Welcome to the library!
2. The library is very pleased to receive your visit. You have free access to all of the media in the library during opening hours.

...

4. Lending conditions
 - For an annual fee of € ... you can borrow up to ... books/media.
 - Borrowing is free.
 - Borrowing is free for those under
 - Borrowing books is free.
 - For non-books there is an additional fee of € ... per year.
 - For non-books there is a fee of € ... per loan.”

Actually the final draft is ready and the 20 translations are being accomplished.

This is not a text suitable as library rules – it is only meant to give a warm welcome.

2. Foreign language stocks in German public libraries. A statistical investigation. A questionnaire that listed the 20 languages mentioned above (+ several others in addition) was mailed electronically to all public libraries in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants asking for the number of items in foreign languages.

At the moment the investigation is being evaluated. We can anticipate that in general we cannot expect well-tended stocks in languages that are less common in Germany. Maybe we even have to admit that we will only be able

to prove evidence of well-tended stocks in English, French and Turkish in most libraries. But this is not our first aim.

The first aim is to give librarians an overview of the statistical figures of foreign language stocks. Therefore we defined measurement categories of very small stocks (1-20 items), small stocks (21-100 items), bigger stocks (100-500 items) and well-developed stocks (more than 500 items). Our findings will be distinguished between stocks both for adults and for children.

We will present the results of the most interesting collections of each language naming the libraries and their OPACs' websites under the URL

www.interkulturellebibliothek.de under the umbrella of the German Library Association. www.interkulturellebibliothek.de will in the future be developed into a portal for librarians and library customers interested in intercultural library management.

3. A collection of best practice patterns concerning intercultural library management in public libraries.

The start for this collection was also marked by a questionnaire mailed electronically to all public libraries in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. This investigation was, and I have to admit this, not really successful. We only had a dozen of relevant contributions, which, of course, will be presented. We had to decide to start one step earlier and present "basics of intercultural library management" on the above mentioned website of the German Library Association summarized by the members of the panel. The fields of work will be:

- Stock management
- Guided tours, activities in libraries
- Supporting or teaching programs
- Social inclusion programs like *Bookstart* or books for reading beginners (in Germany at the moment only on a local basis)
- Patterns for best practice in more advanced countries.

We have just started working on this problem; the first draft will not be presented until late 2007.

4. Letters to parents and children

There is one prominent prototype for this working step: The Minnesota Humanities Commission's "Tips for Reading with Your Children," developed in 2003 (maybe even earlier) This list features eight basic tips for parents/caregivers and the reasons why each tip is important for children. The list is translated into 26 languages (of which hardly one half is of interest for migrant groups in Germany).

On a local level in Germany some patterns to address parents or children concerning reading, reading aloud and story telling have been developed during the last years – all of them similar, all of them a little bit different, some of them only in German, some of them translated into several languages like the one developed in my library, Hamm City Libraries, which was translated into eight languages.

The collection of letters and their translations marks a first step to unification – either in form of a standard text or as a modular basis for texts to be developed individually on a standard basis.

The collection of letters to parents and children will also be presented on www.interkulturellebibliothek.de.

5. Self-marketing

The new panel of experts has tried to present itself to the public from the very beginning by

- Using the website of the German Library Association as a platform for regular publications
- Publishing articles in professional journals
- Giving lectures at conferences on a regional, national and international level
- Organizing conferences on a national or regional level, e.g. the conference "Intercultural library management" in Berlin, April, 25th, 2007, in cooperation with the Humboldt University. The lectures given at the conference will be published as a miscellany in 2008

The speed of advancement is astonishingly fast, although all members of the panel are performing their tasks in the panel as a complimentary part of their ordinary jobs, at least partly as volunteers. This can only come true by a very high rate of self-motivation and self-exploitation. This is absolutely necessary for the start – whether this might be a good basis for a long-term success will be shown in the future.

Lecture given at the Satellite Meeting "Innovative multicultural library services for all, with special reference to literacy, learning and linguistic diversity", organised by: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutes (IFLA), Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations in cooperation with Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section and Reading Section Pretoria, 15 – 17 August 2007

Ein besonderer Dank geht an BI-i für die großzügige Unterstützung meiner Teilnahme an diesem Satellite Meeting sowie sich dem daran anschließenden Weltkongress in Durban.

Ein Bericht über das Satellite Meeting ist für eine der kommenden Ausgaben des IFLA Journal vorgesehen.