

# Report on the State of Libraries in Germany

## Facts and Figures 2020/2021



dbv

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## Dear readers,

libraries shape the future – as partners of kindergartens, schools, science and research, and as freely accessible locations in urban and rural environments where people of all ages can obtain information, participate in continuing education, discover culture and exchange views. Libraries safeguard our cultural heritage and make an important contribution to achieving the UN Sustainability Development Goals. By promoting reading skills, information and media literacy, they support the training of children, adolescents and adults in the most important capabilities required by our knowledge-based society.

Through fulfilment of their educational and cultural mission, libraries make a fundamental contribution towards creating a sense of democratic cohesion in our society. This attribute makes libraries indispensable in the coronavirus crisis because they help to overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Libraries have become attractive "third places" and versatile drivers of innovation, and this positive development must not be undone through cuts of funding introduced as a consequence of the pandemic. We need effective libraries more than ever – so that there are opportunities to participate and educational equality for everyone. This report explains what is required in order to achieve this.

I hope that you enjoy reading the report.

**Prof. Dr. Andreas Degkwitz**  
Federal Chairperson of the German Library Association (dbv)

# What the politicians say



"Giving everyone the opportunity to experience art and culture is essential if we are to ensure equivalent living conditions throughout Germany. Culture creates identity and fosters community, not least in rural areas. Libraries can play a fundamental role in this: Not only do they provide a gateway to knowledge and culture for all groups in the population, but they are also increasingly developing into what Ray Oldenburg termed "third places".

I am very pleased that my office is providing 2.2 million euro to the German Library Association's project *Vor Ort für Alle. Soforthilfeprogramm für zeitgemäße Bibliotheken in ländlichen Räumen* (A place for everyone. Emergency funding programme for modern libraries in rural areas). The coronavirus pandemic is a vivid reminder of the urgent need for modernisation and digital transformation. With that in mind, my office will provide up to 10 million euro in funding to municipal and charitable libraries through a digital programme within the forward-looking NEUSTART KULTUR programme. This way, we can contribute to equivalent living conditions in Germany, especially through culture."

**Prof. Monika Grütters MdB**  
Member of the German Bundestag  
Minister of State for Culture and the Media



"The freedom of art is always an indicator of social and democratic freedom in a country. That is precisely why all types of libraries play a leading role in realising our civil liberties. Not being subject to any form of censorship and within the framework of our liberal and democratic system, they are able to offer unrestricted access to academic and belletristic media. As repositories of knowledge, they also provide material that facilitates the development of critical awareness and formation of opinion.

In addition, libraries provide a wide range of educational options. This makes them both non-commercial "third places" for encounters and integration, as well as spaces for social participation. They promote a culture of discussion and actively encourage the safeguarding of an open and pluralist society. We must knowingly and responsibly make use of the opportunities that this provides."

**Bernd Sibler**  
Chairperson of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultur-MK)



"Virtual reality headsets, 3D printers, computer games and a meeting place for families – the library of today is no longer just a place where you can borrow books. Thanks to their central locations, libraries are increasingly becoming meeting places and sites that host events in towns and cities. They are places where participation and cohesion, exchanges and encounters can occur; they promote reading and language and teach digital literacy. All of these aspects make them an important component of education in their local area.

Yet all this requires sufficient resources in terms of personnel and finances. It is not easy for small and medium-sized communities in particular to fully implement digitalisation and modernisation trends. Just as on all other institutions, the coronavirus pandemic has also had an enormous impact on libraries. The support provided to towns and cities in the form of the stimulus package is helping them to continue to undertake their tasks in the fields of education and culture. Libraries have the opportunity to continue developing the digital and virtual formats that have evolved during the crisis and attract new users."

**Burkhard Jung**  
President of the Association of German Cities

## Libraries in figures

Across Germany there are approximately **9,297** public and academic libraries. These are visited more than **223 million** times each year.

### **340 million books, films and music titles borrowed**

In 2019, public libraries lent out some 340 million books, films and music titles.

### **37 million "online" e-rentals from public libraries**

In 2019, more than 37 million e-media were rented "online" from public libraries.\*

### **244,429 user workstations**

A total of 244,429 user workstations were available, of which 107,016 were in public libraries and 137,413 in academic libraries.

### **85 % WiFi coverage in large towns and cities**

Around 92 % of the full-time managed public libraries in towns with more than 50,000 residents have internet access. Some 85 % of these libraries offered internet access in 2019.

### **551,000 people in continuing education**

In 2019, some 551,000 people participated in training courses, tours, teaching events and online seminars organised by academic libraries.

### **416,000 events**

Public and academic libraries organised roughly 416,000 events, including readings, exhibitions, digital reading courses and media literacy teaching, game conventions, maker-space activities, programming workshops, language courses and other training courses. More than 198,000 (48 %) of these events were designed for children in public libraries.

### **e-books accessed 334 million times in academic libraries**

In academic libraries, users accessed e-books some 334 million times and downloaded articles from digital journals approx. 84 million times.

### **59 % of expenditure for acquisitions spent on digital media by academic libraries**

Around 59 % of expenditure for acquisitions (€ 205 million) available to academic libraries was used to acquire digital media in 2019.

The dbv calls for:

## Make use of the crisis to drive forward digital transformation in libraries



**The coronavirus pandemic has urgently made digitalisation necessary in many areas. The crisis has highlighted significant deficits, primarily in the area of digital education. It is now time to create the foundations for comprehensive hybrid library services, which requires additional investments in premises and in digitalisation and innovation of libraries.**

Libraries are the one educational institution other than schools that teach the required media literacy, and they can deploy their experience to help develop the related national standards for digital and media literacy. That is why libraries must be systematically included in the "DigitalPakt Schule" – the digital package for schools – as an important educational partner.

The dbv is calling on local authorities to equip every library with a broadband connection using funds

from the stimulus package. The federal states need to make financial resources available that will allow for rapid installation of the appropriate equipment and technology in all libraries.

The digital expertise of all library employees throughout Germany also needs to be reinforced through modular online training opportunities. Copyright laws should be adapted to digital requirements for the benefit of users. The development of analogue and digital library spaces as freely accessible meeting places on the one hand, and as creative locations for teaching digital literacy on the other hand, is a worthwhile investment for the future.

The dbv calls for:

# Increase the potential of libraries to achieve sustainability goals



**Libraries are sustainable institutions per se: information, knowledge and infrastructure is shared and made accessible for everyone on a long-term basis. Under the terms of their mandate, they provide access to quality education, information and communication technologies. As important educational and cultural institutions, they must be strategically integrated in the implementation of the UN's 2030 Agenda as a matter of urgency.**

An increasing number of libraries are proactively promoting social and ecological sustainability – be it by extending their media collection, hosting panel discussions on the issue of sustainability, or by providing support to refugees during the integration process.

As public, non-commercial meeting places they encourage inclusion, diversity, interaction between people and intercultural understanding. The work of libraries fosters the digital, social and cultural participation and thus contributes to finding a sustainable route out of the current crisis.

The dbv is calling for a stronger recognition and use of the potential of libraries in helping to achieve the sustainability goals by politics and administration. Libraries must be incorporated as partners in both the federal government's sustainability strategy and regional and local strategies. This is the only way of connecting them more closely with other cultural and educational institutions, so that they can work together to offer services designed to contribute to a sustainable future.

# The dbv calls for: React to changed user expectations and increased pressure on use by financing construction measures



**The need to adapt to the needs of current and future users, combined with the wide range of new media formats continually creates new challenges for library buildings. When media is converted into digital formats, this frees up space to redesign internal structures and creates physical spaces that will meet the increased need for communication and stimulus.**

The transformation of libraries from book-orientated knowledge repositories into user-orientated "third places" changes not only their underlying concepts and the services they can provide but also the spatial opportunities. Nowadays, libraries are public places that perform a number of new tasks in addition to providing information and promoting reading and language skills. They have become places for encounters, social integration, digital participation and life-long and joint learning. They are also institutions that safeguard our cultural heritage and make it accessible to everyone. Changes in working and

learning habits mean that there is a need to maintain a constant balancing act between enabling communication and concentration and creating spaces that can be adapted as required.

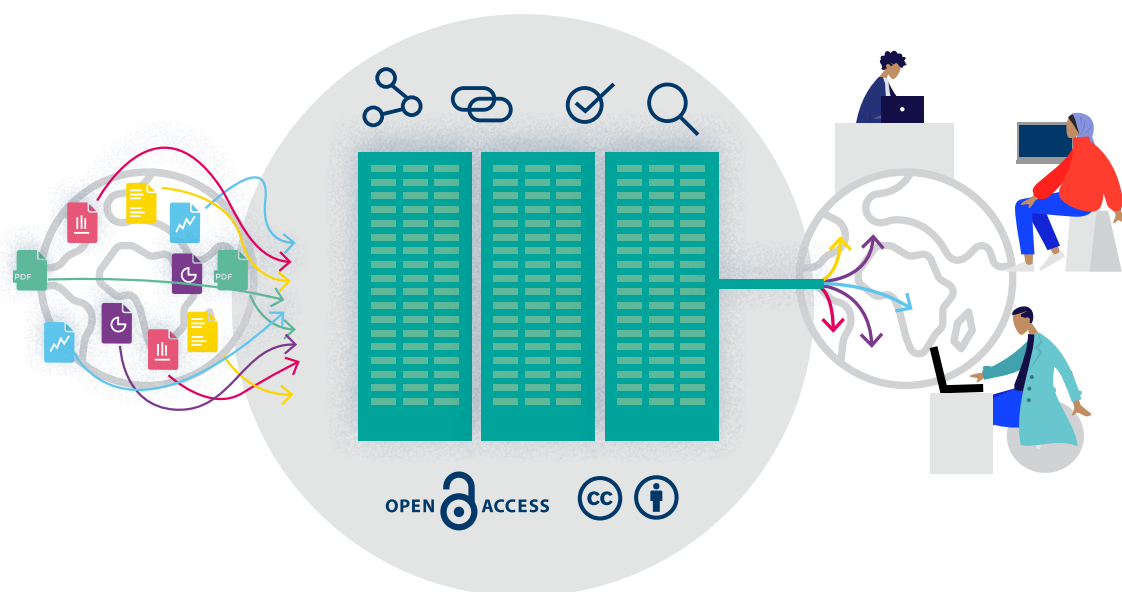
Libraries must be designed to be accessible, flexible and environmentally friendly. However, many buildings are now in need of refurbishment or renovation. Alongside the normal signs of wear and tear, these are primarily functional changes that will result in new spatial concepts.

The dbv is therefore calling for support for measures designed to update library structures so that they can host a wide range of uses and create internal multifunctional areas. Barrier-free design must be the target from the outset, both in terms of structural design and use of funding.



The dbv calls for:

# Funding of research data infrastructure in a sustainable form and acquirement of the required personnel resources



**In the wake of the digital revolution, academic work and research have become increasingly data-driven. Processing research data is an aspect that is thus becoming increasingly important. Academics must have the ability to teach data skills, while library employees must receive training so that they can provide professional support to data management processes during research projects.**

Effective research data management is essential if results are to be transparent, verifiable and suitable for reutilisation. Appropriate management, skills and viable service infrastructures are necessary if organisational and technical measures for the preparation, use, publication, cross-referencing and storage of research data are to be effective, particularly in academic libraries.

The creation and extension of research data repositories at the local, regional and national levels require additional financing to ensure that libraries can continue to offer the corresponding services over the long term. The same applies to the development of infrastructures and tools for retrieving, processing and reusing data.

The dbv is therefore demanding that libraries and academics should receive more support to enable them to develop research data management concepts that are in line with Open Science and the Fair Data principles.



The dbv calls for:

# Making the promotion of reading skills a priority in educational policy



**To participate in education, the ability to read is essential. The ability to read also makes it possible to take an active role in our digital society and this skill must thus be appropriately promoted. Libraries are indispensable in this connection. Together with kindergartens, further education colleges and adult education centres, they are the key players when it comes to promoting reading outside the main education system.**

The results of recent educational surveys<sup>1</sup> show that there is an acute need to act when it comes to promoting reading in Germany. Too many children do not learn to read properly, which jeopardises their chances of being successful at school and at work and, therefore, their chances of growing as individuals and playing an active role in society. It has long been known that placing a focus on literacy education from birth is extremely important when it comes to language acquisition and the ability to read. Many adults have very limited or no reading skills as they did not receive enough support in this area in their

childhood. There are 6.2 million "functional illiterates" in Germany<sup>2</sup>. That is why the dbv is supporting the demand for introduction of a national reading package across all areas of society.

As cooperation partners, libraries provide the official educational institutions with support measures related services, promote reading from a young age through a range of events, and make digital reading media accessible for everyone.

To enable them to act as interfaces between the family environment and official educational institutions, the dbv is calling for libraries to receive additional resources from their funding bodies and from politics and to be systematically incorporated in education policies.

<sup>1</sup> For example, PISA 2018 and IGLU 2016  
<sup>2</sup> Grottlüschen, Anke; Buddeberg, Klaus; Dutz, Gregor; Heilmann, Lisanne; Stammer, Christopher (2019): LEO 2018 – Leben mit geringer Literalität. Press brochure, Hamburg.

The dbv calls for:

# The promotion of libraries as institutions for media literacy in the communal educational landscape



**The ability to use digital media has become one of the most important key skills in both daily life and at work. Libraries not only provide access to the internet and digital media for all groups of the population, but also provide training in how to use these. As the focus needs to be placed on increasing the opportunities for participation among different age groups, it is imperative that services are offered continually and in sustainable formats.**

Their involvement in the sector of media literacy make libraries the most important external educational and cooperation partners for schools and kindergartens. They offer programming workshops with robots, train people in using digital end devices and dealing with social media; they promote technical literacy through so-called "TechnoThek" (interactive displays designed to encourage children to learn about various aspects of science) and use apps to promote reading skills and enable users to create their own cartoons.

Libraries therefore support the equality of digital opportunities. Yet, due to a lack of financing, many of the projects offered in libraries are only temporary. The dbv is calling on library funding bodies to strategically extend the technical and personnel resources available in the sector of media literacy in libraries and finance them over the long term.

This will help to prevent the development of a social divide between those who are digitally savvy and those who do not (yet) have access to digital media.

# The dbv calls for: Investment in libraries as community centres and sites of information transfer



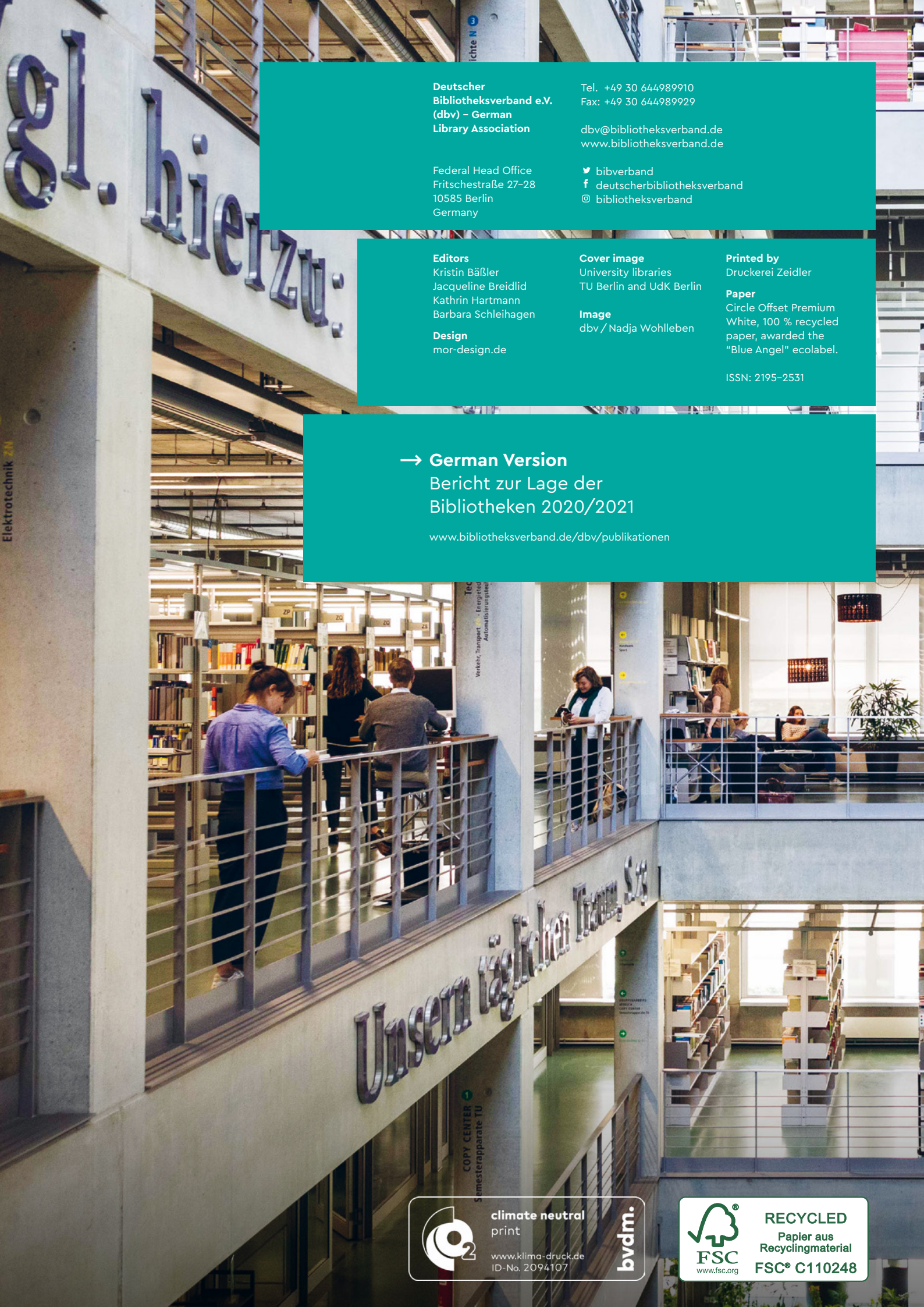
**Libraries create access and enable participation for everyone. If the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic are to be overcome, there must be no cuts to funding in the areas of education and culture in this time of crisis.**

This year's survey of members conducted by the dbv on the financial situation of public libraries has shown that the cost of tackling the coronavirus pandemic is having a detrimental effect on educational opportunities for the general public. The financial impact of this will not become fully apparent in local budgets until next year.

More than 32 % of the participating libraries already assume that they are, or will be, affected by budget cutting measures. 23.5 % are currently subject to an overall spending freeze. 26 % said that their funds have already been cut or that cuts are planned.

The sorely-needed investments in the development of future-orientated services and the urgently required modernisation of infrastructures and buildings, for which almost half of the institutions have insufficient funds, will not be possible over the next few years. Yet libraries that meet contemporary needs are an essential requirement in this time of crisis: the general public can get information there, take part in training sessions, prepare for job applications, network and exchange views with others. By promoting reading skills and offering training in media literacy, libraries provide forms of education that are essential within our information-driven society. It would thus be highly counterproductive to introduce funding cuts, particularly in this area, at this time.





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