NETWORKING AND COMPUTERIZATION FOR LIBRARIES IN GERMANY

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ABSTRACT: Germany is divided in 16 states, each of which is independent in matters of education and culture. So in the beginning of computerization and networking in Germany, many different computer systems were installed in the various libraries. In the need of centralization 7 different cooperative library networks were developed. The author wants to give a short impression of the problems especially for special libraries to cope with this variety of systems.

Introduction to the history of networking in Germany

Germany is divided into 16 states, each of which is independent in matters of education and culture. When the first computer systems for libraries were developed, each state was therefore able to buy any system for its state libraries with no regard to what any of the other states were doing. Indeed, even within the states the various libraries bought different library computer systems. In 1973 the state Nordrhein-Westfalen was one of the first to recognize the need for unification and cooperative cataloguing. The state founded the cooperative library network called “Nordrhein-Westfälischer Bibliotheksverbund” together with a part of Rheinland-Pfalz. In the middle of the 80s most of the other states of Germany followed suit. Six other cooperative networks were founded, but only three of them used the same software - and that was more or less a coincidence!

These cooperative networks are:

- Bibliotheksverbund Bayern
- Bibliotheksverbund Berlin-Brandenburg
- Hessisches Bibliotheksinformationssystem für Katalogisierung u. Auskunft
- Niedersächsischer Bibliotheksverbund
- Norddeutscher Bibliotheksverbund (which covered all the states where the marine science libraries are located)
- Nordrhein-Westfälischer Bibliotheksverbund
- Südwestdeutscher Bibliotheksverbund

Saarland is the only state which is not a partner in any cooperative.

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Bibliotheksverbund Bayern:

online: 1984
Betriebssystem: BS 2000
Software: SISIS

Bibliotheksverbund Berlin-Brandenburg:

online: 1985
Betriebssystem: BS 2000
Software: IBAS
States: Berlin + Brandenburg

Hessisches Bibliotheksinformationssystem für Katalogisierung u. Auskunft:

online: 1987
Betriebssystem: since 1995: PICA
Software: Hessen + part of Rheinland-Pfalz

Niedersächsischer Bibliotheksverbund:

online: 1984
Betriebssystem: Guardian 90
Software: PICA
States: Niedersachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen

since 1995: “Göttinger Bibliotheksverbund”
together with: Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schleswig-Holstein

Norddeutscher Bibliotheksverbund:

online: 1986 (only Hamburg) 1992-1994
Betriebssystem: BS 2000
Software: BIS
States: Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schleswig-Holstein
Nordrhein-Westfälischer Bibliotheksverband:

online: 1973
Betriebssystem: BS 2000
Software: DIS
States: Nordrhein-Westfalen, part of Rheinland-Pfalz

Südwestdeutscher Bibliotheksverband:

online: 1986
Betriebssystem: BS 2000
Software: DIS
States: Baden-Württemberg, part of Rheinland-Pfalz, Sachsen

Each of these library alliances decided to set up one data bank to which every cataloguer of the partner-libraries would have access. This has the advantages of shared cataloguing and is, for the most part, comparable to OCLC.

In recent months the German Library Institute in Berlin has been working on a project to find a way to make the different computer systems compatible. Another plan to centralize is to form a consortium for the various cooperatives. But there are still some questions concerning how to realize this solution:
- Who is going to decide on a standard?
- The states are still independent in matters of education and culture. So who will make the final decision if they can't reach any consensus?
- Who will take the necessary legislative initiative?

While the university libraries, supported by the states, and the libraries of the Federal Government are partners of the cooperative networks, the small special libraries are not yet being considered for participation in the cooperatives.

Such libraries in Germany are often libraries which are financed by associations, commercial firms, churches, or by cooperation between the Federal Government, the state and the German Research Foundation.

In view of such different financing modes it is very difficult to find a common method of computerization. So the special libraries founded their own associations for the various fields, and within these associations they are trying to set up their own cooperative networks.

The association of church libraries is one of the first which began to set up its own cooperative network. So far their main aim is not cooperative cataloguing, but creating a common database for the inter-library lending department. Another cooperative is planned by the Association of Parliament and
Administrative Libraries; the German Research Foundation supports a project involving three big art libraries.

The Association of Marine Science Libraries is also thinking about setting up its own cooperative network.

When in 1992 the states Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein founded the Norddeutscher Bibliotheksverbund, based on BIS software developed by the computer firm DABIS, most of the marine science libraries bought the smaller version of BIS: BIS-LOK. This was the easiest way to achieve compatibility with the cooperative network - if ever the day came when special libraries were allowed to participate.

The Norddeutscher Verbund was in existence for almost 3 years. The university libraries of the states Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein were planning to be connected. The Kiel University Library had already done the appropriate cataloguing for the system.

At the end of 1993 these same states decided to stop working with the BIS software and instead chose to merge into another alliance nearby; the Niedersächsischer Verbund. In the beginning of 1995 they got together and named the new cooperative “Göttinger Bibliotheks-Verbund”, after the city in which the computer centre with the database for all the libraries is located.

When our state Schleswig-Holstein informed us that the Norddeutscher Verbund would be terminated and merged with the Niedersächsischer Verbund this was a great shock. The new cooperative would use PICA, a cataloguing system developed in the Netherlands. The software for acquisition, the serials unit, OPAC and loan system is LBS3. LBS3 is developed for university libraries and is far too complicated for small, special libraries. At first it seemed as though it would be difficult to continue to use BIS-LOK - or any other system - and still be able to participate in the alliance.

In spring 1995 DABIS was finally able to produce an interface to PICA, so that everybody who was using BIS-LOK and had the money to buy the interface was able to calm down.

**Computerizing in the library of the Institute of Marine Sciences in Kiel, Germany**

The library at the Institute of Marine Sciences in Kiel has a homemade computer system which is not compatible with the systems used by any of the library alliances. Because our system is very clumsy and complicated, we have been trying for years to replace it with new software. Since the financial situation deteriorated, we were never granted enough money to be able to achieve that end.

In the beginning of 1995, a new director was appointed at our Institute. In January he went around the Institute in an attempt to get better acquainted with the various departments, staff and their problems. And so he visited me in my office too and asked about problems having to do with the library. I told
him about our inadequate computer system. He suggested I try and find a good and, of course, inexpensive solution.

My choice was already made a few days after the above-mentioned “miracle” took place: I decided that we needed the computer system which most of the marine science libraries already use: BIS-LOK. This would enable us to exchange data with the other libraries, and construct a database for publications in marine sciences. I would, therefore, buy BIS-LOK. While waiting for it to be delivered - a period of 4 or 6 weeks - I would go and get the hardware. Then - allowing 2 weeks to transfer the old data into the new data bank - within two months we would have the world’s most modern library and live happily ever after!

Putting a lid on my euphoria for a moment I decided it would be wise to seek some assurance first - by way of making certain I would be getting what I want and need - so I asked the computer firm DABIS to confirm in writing that BIS-LOK really is able to communicate with PICA. I also spoke to the Göttinger Bibliotheksverband. They told me that they were familiar with the interface, and said that, though it does not work 100%, it would be all right.

“Great,” I thought, “This is it! I will be able to cooperate with both systems. No doubt about it: this would definitely be our new library software.”

Next thing I did was call the Ministry of Education and Arts. I was told that we would first have to apply to be able to work with the alliance. We would also have to pay for the privilege but they were not able to tell me how much. I would receive that information only after submitting the application itself. The only thing that was certain so far was that partners would be required to pay. The actual cost would only be able to be calculated after it had become clear exactly how many libraries would be cooperating in the alliance. My problem was then: how do I convince my director to give me “carte blanche”, i.e. sign an application form which makes no mention of the actual costs that would be incurred? I decided to shelve that problem - thinking it would make more sense to concentrate on getting a system first anyway.

I contacted DABIS and asked them to make us an offer. I was greatly supported in this by the head of our computer centre. He was in support of my decision to invest in BIS-LOK, BUT - since the Institute is partly financed by the state - we had to get their approval as well. The state would, of course prefer LBS3, but they would be willing to give their permission if we could show them at least 3 offers submitted by other companies.

And this is precisely where the next problem arises: people who do not work in libraries base their decisions on the question of cost, rather than on user-friendliness etc. The most crucial argument - at least from my vantage point - that it is very important to have the same software as most of the partners in the Association of Marine Science Libraries - seems of no relevance to these decision-makers.
In July, almost 7 months after I first received permission to look for a new computer system, the investigation of which meant 7 months' worth of reading, discussing, traveling, learning and arguing with numerous computer firms, computer specialists and librarians - the head of our computer centre and I finished our research and wrote the final and formal application for our new computer system. But since we not only need all the money we were meant to get this year but need additional money EVERY year for maintenance and yearly updates we don’t know if we will get the okay to go on.

Solutions?

The librarians of Germany, of course, dream of ONE cooperative network to which ALL libraries are connected. But because of the difficulties with financing, independence, organization and efficiency, the library committee of the German Research Foundation (DFG) recommends settling the problems by means of one of the following solutions (DFG 1995):

1. Improvement of two already existing systems - PICA and BIS, for example

   PICA is a non-profit foundation. All the other systems are commercial products.

   This has advantages and disadvantages:

   Buying a commercial product means being dependent on the computer firm. Buying something from a non-profit foundation means having no one to make liable for compensation. The cooperative would have to have institutionalized representation in the PICA Foundation. It would have to be guaranteed that the cooperatives have equal rights in all decisions. And, in the event of dissolution, the cooperatives would have to have the right to carry on using and developing the software.

2. Development of ONE, totally new library system

   In the beginning years of their foundation the cooperative networks were mere cataloguing cooperatives: available services for users were fairly limited. The electronic information services were developed mainly in the local library systems.

   New library software for cooperative networks would provide an opportunity to learn from mistakes and to combine the aims of cooperative cataloguing with the requirements of the new age of electronic information services.

   It might be possible to cope with the technical and organizational problems. The financing, as well as the transfer of the data, would have to be guaranteed. All cooperative networks would
have to be willing to participate. The decision-makers would have to make clear the aims and timetable and they would have to control the project.

The German Research Foundation would support this solution financially if it were guaranteed that all the advice they provided in order to minimize the danger of failure would be taken.

The recommendations of the German Research Foundation are guidelines for German library policy because the Foundation is one of our main financial backers.

To conclude I would like to draw your attention to the fact that there are still some problems which arise because most people in Germany jump on the bandwagon of computerization without thinking about any of the consequences.

One of these self-induced problems was discovered during the German-Library-Days in Spring of this year. The idea is that as soon as most of the libraries have an online connection to one of the alliances, manually operated inter-library lending will cease.

Just as in many other countries, the financial situation of most of the special libraries is very bad. In Germany we even have special libraries without a computer system. They are lucky to have an electric typewriter! Some of the libraries have very simple library software, which is not compatible with the main systems. And - because of the growing financial crisis - they will have no chance to get a computer system for quite some time.

But these special libraries are the ones with the special books you can’t find in the big university libraries. They are the collectors of the so-called “grey literature”, printed in Germany and other countries, which is sometimes more important for our scientists than the published books.

Please, don’t misunderstand me: I think it is very important to take that step into the new age of networking. But when I look at the past and see how messily it started I think we should take a moment to think about our aims and how best to reach them. It is only when we have a plan, that we should start again.

I believe that we librarians should be the ones dictating the use of software, rather than letting ourselves be dictated to by the software itself.
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