

The Battle for Good Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries are growing and changing service institutions with ever increasing demand of space, equipment and other facilities. Adequate library buildings are therefore in the centre of managerial tasks of librarians. But the construction and reconstruction of buildings for big university or national libraries is rather expensive. That make the programming and the building process a rather political task with a lot of side effects. Every situation is different, but the experiences at 4 places – Freiburg, Karlsruhe, Heidelberg and Göttingen - show some similarities of the ongoing processes too. These processes for the programming, decision and realization of successful library building activities will be analysed under 6 major aspects

- Situation
- Program
- Promotion
- Partner
- Decision Process
- Result

It should be mentioned, that all libraries in these 4 case studies are financed by the state government: Freiburg, Heidelberg and Göttingen are State Universities. The budget comes via the university from the state government. Best there is a special financing scheme for bigger investment in universities: The federal government pays 50% of the amount needed. The Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe is financed by the state government as well. But there is normally no additional funding by the federal government – that makes it interesting for the States to build combined State and University Libraries like newly the example at Dresden shows.¹ We will see that in Karlsruhe different federal investment resources could be used.

UNIVERSITÄSBIBLIOTHEK FREIBURG IM BREISGAU

Wolfgang Kehr became librarian of Freiburg University im Breisgau in 1966 ([Kehr, 1979](#); [Müller, 1979](#); [Schubel, 1994](#)). It was the time of student revolutions, the foundation of new universities, and the overall expansion of the education sector in industrial countries. The traditional Freiburg University library system had a central library, and a huge number of completely independent departmental libraries. The Library - built in the 18th century by Maria Theresa - had been located in a neo-gothic building from the beginning of the 20th century. After suffering some damage during the Second World War, it was reconstructed with additional space for offices, and a new reading room in the former yard in the centre of the triangle-shaped building. The management was a bit old fashioned, but the staff were user friendly and the collections valuable.

When Wolfgang Kehr surveyed the situation - and I was able to help him from 1967 - it was quite clear to him that a new building was highly necessary. But there was a big danger: the old building was provisionally constructed for the extension of the book-stacks to the east. So was the lack of space for books not a sufficient cause for a new building with better and new service facilities for users and librarians?

The next step for Kehr was a 'service offensive' with investment in high-use textbook material, better opening hours, etc. The result was a doubling of the number of book loans over a two-year period. The press wrote later that the library had changed from a book museum to a modern information service centre. With the assistance of the University in the background - University Chancellor Siburg was a particular supporter of the policy of a central library - the way through the institutions (Minister of Culture, Minister of Finance, Wissenschaftsrat) could start. It was a major help -

urged on by the student revolution - that the state-wide library planning process started in 1968. As Secretary of the 'Arbeitsgruppe Bibliotheksplan Baden-Württemberg' I was responsible for data collection and analysis for the whole state ([Mittler, 1973-1975](#)). German library building standards then in compilation - now published as [DIN-Fachbericht 13 \(Fuhlrott & Jopp, 1998\)](#) - were adopted for the first time in Baden-Württemberg and proved their use in the programming process for the new building in Freiburg. Kehr and his crew developed a master plan for the building with a detailed description of function, size and connections for every single room, to show the University and the architects of the University's Estates Department (Universitätsbauamt - an institution run by the Ministry of Finance). The positive outcome was that the additional square metres required came to more or less the same result as in the calculation using the new standards.

The programme for the building was ready: the battle for the money could start. Publicity was needed to promote the idea ([Universitätsbibliothek, 1995](#)). A two-pronged strategy raised public awareness of successes in improving the services and the space problems for books and readers. Headlines such as 'Die Haltbarkeit unhaltbarer Zustände' ('The continuation of an unsupportable situation') were quite aggressive.² The area for the new building was occupied by a 19th-century school building. As opposition against pulling down this New Renaissance building grew, reports were initiated into the load bearing of the overfilled book-stacks. As a consequence closure of the library had to take place, hundreds of thousands of books had to be moved into the underground parking area of the university close to the library. Was it by accident that this just happened at the time of elections in Baden-Württemberg? Filbinger, the Prime Minister and Member of the State Parliament for Freiburg, made clear political statements in favour of a new library building.

The final push came as a result of a major disaster in the Stuttgart University Library. The underground stacks were flooded during a severe thunderstorm, with extremely heavy rainfall causing the loss of valuable holdings. The question put to the University by the Minister of Finance about whether a similar accident could happen in Freiburg was answered in the affirmative: we confirmed that, yes, the books in the underground parking were near a small canal (running under the old building as well), which could cause a flood disaster. The Minister of Finance sped to spend the money for the new building.

It was designed by the Universitätsbauamt - as a typical concrete building of the time, in the style of architectural brutalism, with enormous costs for air-conditioning and other library technical infrastructure. The citizens of Freiburg did not like it, but the students were - and are - quite happy with the comfortable reading and open access facilities. There are plans in progress for a total reconstruction of the building - perhaps an interesting paper for the next LIBER Architecture Seminar!

BADISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK (BLB) KARLSRUHE

When the author took over the directorship of the State Library in Karlsruhe in 1974, his predecessor proudly presented him with a signed plan for a building extension for readers and staff (But he had overlooked the additional space needed for new acquisitions. The calculations for the 'Bibliotheksplan Baden-Württemberg' - which I had prepared myself ([Römer, 1992; cit. 3, vol.1, p. 450](#)) - showed the demand quite clearly. That was a bad starting point for programming plans for a bigger library extension. The Kultusministerium officials were unhappy about going to the Minister of Finance with new demands ... so who else could help a State Library director?

Successful library projects will never happen without good faith. Karlsruhe is the former capital of Baden, a State in its own right until 1952. A plebiscite brought the union with Württemberg and Württemberg-Hohenzollern in that year - but against the majority of votes in Baden itself. On the basis of the reaction, the German court, Bundesverfassungsgericht, located in Karlsruhe, decided that a new vote should be organised in Baden. This took place in 1975 - this time with a majority result for Baden-Württemberg. This changed the minds of the local town planners in Karlsruhe. They had provided a central area for the future parliament - the site of the former Foreign Ministry, which had been destroyed during the Second World War. The area was located just opposite the building housing the BLB book-stacks.

In between, more detailed calculations about the space needed for the extension of the library building had clearly shown that the idea of building additional suspended floors above the readers' building had to be abandoned. A new building was necessary - giving the library space for an extension to the Natural Sciences Museum, which shared the building with the library.

The Mayor of Karlsruhe was sympathetic to these new ideas, which gave him the prospect of a representative building with widely accepted cultural functions (in the same way as in Freiburg, where the use of the Library had doubled by now) instead of a now useless area, not to say 'ein Schandfleck'.... The political struggle began ([BLB, 1979](#)).

Karlsruhe's politicians - Ministers such as Bender, and Deputies like Frau Menzinger, along with Mayor Dullenkopf, used all their political rhetorical skills to illustrate the poor showing of the former capital in the State's investment policy. And it was election time again ... Filbinger - familiar from Freiburg - again gave positive support to the need to improve the library's building situation - and after his sudden political fall, his successor Späth - from the Württemberg part of the state - fulfilled Filbinger's promise. (An investment programme for city centre improvement also provided additional funding from the federal government.)

But now the officials of the Ministry of Finance had to be convinced. It was not too difficult to present the exact calculations for the space requirements. They agreed with that. But the idea of a new building looked totally unacceptable. 'Salamitaktik' (lowering the resistance 'slice by slice') was necessary. First, they accepted only the term 'Ergänzungsbau' (additional building), but on the central area opposite the storage building. As the idea of a architectural tender for a building in such an outstanding position came into the picture, they accepted 'Neubau', but only for the first stage 'Ergänzungsbau'; and, finally, it became a tender for the 'Neubau', and the first stage of it. The successful tenderer was the well-known German architect Unger ([Staatliches Hochbauamt, 1992](#)). Späth, the Prime Minister, himself initiated the construction. It worked out as I had calculated: it was totally impossible to stop the work at half the building. The completed library building was opened in 1991.

UNIVERSITÄTSBIBLIOTHEK HEIDELBERG

The author participated in the tender at Karlsruhe in 1997 as newly installed library director of Heidelberg University ([Mittler, 1989](#)). The sudden death of my predecessor at this library had caused this unforeseen change (partly influenced by Engler, the Minister of Culture). The starting point in Heidelberg was rather different. The oldest University in Germany was traditionally located in the town centre. But the expansion of the Faculties of Medicine with their hospitals, and the Sciences with huge research institutes, brought about the extension into the Neuenheimer Feld, where a new campus was built. In the 1960s the University planned to move Humanities into this area as well. The library was to be the forerunner. But this new building never came about. In the 1970s it was decided to keep Humanities in the old town centre. This would have been the right moment to use for the building extension the area that had been available since the building's construction at the beginning of the 20th century (a similar situation to that in Freiburg). Some well considered proposals by a Swedish architect were developed during the early 1960s.

The so-called Triplex building (with the students' restaurant, space for institutes and an underground parking area) was the result of a difficult planning and decision process for this area - leaving the library in a completely hopeless situation. As well as the holdings for medicine and sciences, a growing part of the Humanities collection had to be brought to Neuenheim, or into an additional storage facility in an old tobacco factory ... More than 1.5 tons of books were transported every working day - a real risk for the valuable historical collections of this ancient university library.

As the author began his responsibilities, some renovation work had been started to repair damage caused by the building of the Triplex. This offered a chance to improve the functionality of the old building (the first director had described it as an example of how not to build a library). In parallel with a lot of activities directed at improving the services, the plans for the future functionality of the building were totally redesigned.

After brainstorming sessions and extensive discussions, a solution was devised which allowed the

- construction of an information centre close to the entrance hall
- provision of new accessions on open shelf areas and
- increases in the number of reader seats
- improvement in the functional arrangement of staff locations

These new ideas (accepted by both the university and by the state building office) were widely promoted in the local press and media.

The new concept had one disadvantage: the space for books was severely reduced by the use of the former closed book-stacks as reader and open access areas. What could be done in the dense environment of the town centre with streets and buildings around the library? Before an answer to this problem could be found, the mid-term demand for library space had to be calculated. The use of the standards mentioned above assisted this task very much. The result was clear - a new library building in Neuenheim was essential. But on the other hand - having the heavily book-oriented Humanities in the town centre - would that not be the right library in the wrong place? And the chances for a new building were quite small at a time when money was tighter and tighter ... Was there no chance of having an extension of the book storage facilities in the centre?

The final solution was a proposal to build an underground storage area with mobile book-stacks, and a capacity of about 1.2 million items. But the only area left for this was the courtyard of the 'Neue Universität' opposite, crossing a street underground. The starting point for the promotion of this novel idea was the first LIBER Architecture Seminar in Heidelberg in 1980, organised in association with Professor Lieber from Münster ([LIBER, 1981](#)). The conference participants took part in a panel discussion with the Rector of the University, the Mayor of Heidelberg, officials from the Ministries of Finance and Research and Culture, the Estates Department and the Library. I prepared a 'scenario' - and the majority of participants of the panel used it. The official from the Minister of Finance commented only that instead of the opening of the additional building, the start of the works could coincide with the celebrations in 1986 for the 600th anniversary of the founding of Heidelberg University. He was right. On 8 July 1986, Prime Minister Späth, familiar from Karlsruhe, was actively engaged with a mechanical digger - and the delegates at the LIBER Annual Conference were present at this event. The difficult works (at one point, the 'Hexenturm', the oldest building in Heidelberg, was in real danger of collapsing into the excavation) are now finished. The books have moved to the new area; and the restored garden, as in the past, offers a popular recreation area for students.

The decision to opt for the underground stacks in the centre did not mean the total abandonment of the plans for a new library building in Neuenheim. But it gave time to prepare for it with more calm. I hope that my second successor has a chance to seize the opportunity.

NIEDERSÄCHSISCHE STAATS- UND UNIVERSITÄTSBIBLIOTHEK (SUB) GÖTTINGEN

Your walk - and mine - through new or restored library buildings in Germany now goes further north again - to Göttingen. When I began my work there in 1990, the outside of the new building was finished. It was officially opened in 1993 ([Staatshochbauverwaltung, 1993](#)). I will not say too much about the story of this building, which was planned by my predecessor. It is an extraordinary building, combining aesthetics and functionality in an almost ideal way. And it became a model for other new libraries in Germany and Europe. But there is one hidden problem left in the new building: it is - deliberately - too small for the library. The original requirement for about 30,000 square metres was reduced to 22,000, taking into account the space in the historical building, which was to be used for special collections.

The restoration of the historical building was planned to start immediately after completing the new one ([Mittler, 1994](#)). The reality, however, was quite different. Everyone supposed that the old building was empty, and the Green Party asked the State government to sell the building. An enquiry about the costs of the refurbishment came up with a figure of 52 million DM, including works for the improvement of the fixtures and the fire security of the building. The entire well-prepared master planning and many of my promotional activities seemed to have no result year after year.

In 1998 I gave a speech at an awards ceremony for journalists. A person in the auditorium congratulated me on my interesting speech, and was really impressed by the history and the value of the Göttingen library. Ten days later, this man began his career as Minister of Research and Culture for Lower Saxony. It was at the time of the preparation activities of Hanover Expo and Gutenberg Year 2000. I was just organizing the digitisation of Göttingen's [Gutenberg Bible](#), which I had planned to include in an exhibition for Gutenberg Year ([Füssel & Rohlfing, 2000](#)). But for this purpose, the old Church in the historical building had to be restored. With a very active Minister, it was possible to finance the necessary works for the restoration - and for the digitisation - and to finish on time. The Gutenberg exhibition was an extraordinary success. As well as making the complete Bible available on the Web, it was also the starting point for the restoration of the old building thanks to additional grants from the Volkswagenstiftung and other sponsoring activities ([Mittler, 2003](#)). A new entrance allows security access to visitors to the exhibitions; to users of the newly-built research library with its departments of manuscripts and rare books, maps, and Asian and African collections; and to the open access areas with classified 17th to 19th century holdings - ideal research facilities for specialists in the history of science, as well as for researchers interested in the 18th century, for which Göttingen is the national library.

The refurbishment of the historical building is progressing fast, and will be finished in 2005.

A major part of the 'Göttingen library concept' will then be complete. But there is an additional project for the Sciences in preparation, which will bring the departmental libraries together in a new building. 24/7 services will be as obvious as multimedia production facilities beside the usual library services. The campus for the Sciences in the north of Göttingen will have a pulsating heart.

It is incredible - but true - that another project I had at the back of my mind has a chance to be realised in addition: the central library for the humanities. Many of the humanities institutes are concentrated in a former hospital area. Others are spread out over the city - partly in former private houses of market value. The State of Lower Saxony, when it made the University of Göttingen a foundation in 2002, kept some of these houses, promising to build a 8,000 square

metre building. This would allow the concentration of the library holdings of most of the institutes, or connect the existing library facilities with the new central library building in a continuum of space. That would be a final asset for the Göttingen library system, where the idea of the modern research library was worldwide first realised in the 18th century.

CONCLUSION

The development of concepts - and the creation of new buildings or the refurbishment of old ones - is sometimes an adventure. You may start with an idea of an extension and finish with a totally new building (Karlsruhe); or you may find plans for a new building and go back to the restoration and extension of an old one (Heidelberg); you may promote it without success year on year, and then it can come about, as it were, overnight (Göttingen).

One should, in any case, have some principles in mind:

Look for a good, visionary concept with

- a professional programme of high quality,
- future oriented user functionalities, and
- appeal for university administrators as well as for politicians.

Try to find partners in

- the university, the town and the state
- the press and the media

Organize events, give papers, produce leaflets to promote your ideas.

Make promotional speeches - and speak to anyone who is willing to listen to you.

Discuss your project as one that will be achieved - not just as a simple idea in your mind.

Always be prepared to present detailed and up-to-date plans at a moment's notice.

Seize the opportunity.

And, finally, have a little luck!

You will succeed.

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WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

- DIN. Deutsches Institut für Normung e.V. <http://www2.din.de/>
- Gutenberg Bible. <http://www.gutenbergdigital.de>

NOTES

1. Sächsische Landesbibliothek - Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden. <http://www.tu-dresden.de/slub/>
2. Uni-Presse 3 (1971), p. 1