

Celebrating “Partner Country USA, 2016–2019”

In August of 2014, the American Library Association (ALA) and the German Library & Information Association (Bibliothek und Information Deutschland, BID) signed a landmark agreement to work



together to create opportunities for networking and information exchange between librarians working in many types of libraries in the United States and Germany.¹ The resulting project “Partner Country USA 2016-2019” was scaffolded on the major annual library conferences, Leipzig Bibliothekskongress (2016 and 2019)², and ALA Annual Conference (Chicago 2017, and New Orleans 2018).

BID, the umbrella organization for the major German library associations, launched the partner country initiative in 2007. The goal of the partner country project is to bring together professionals with international perspectives on the issues libraries have in common worldwide. Past partner countries have included Denmark, Spain, and Turkey; the Netherlands will succeed the US in 2019. Two subcommittees within BID and ALA handled the organizational details that helped shape the program, the Library & Information International (Bibliothek Information International BII), and the International Relations Committee, Europe Subcommittee, of the ALA International Relations Office (IRO).

The first conference attended by a US delegation was the 6th Bibliothekskongress 2016 in Leipzig, Germany.³ The Leipzig Bibliothekskongress has special significance within annual German library conferences because it returns to the city of Leipzig every three years. BID organizes the Leipzig meetings, which highlight BID’s international initiatives. Regular Bibliothekartage (Librarians’ Conferences) are organized by the Berufsverband Information Bibliothek e.V. (BIB), the professional library and information association, and the Association of German Librarians (VDB – Verein Deutscher Bibliothekarinnen und Bibliothekare e.V.), and take place in other cities in the interim years.⁴ The Leipzig meeting occurs in the same week as the Leipzig book fair, a fair that considers itself a “Lesemesse” (Reading Fair), because it offers many author events and readings. The 2016 book fair featured, among others, Don Winslow, Aleksandar Hemon, and Ellen Israel Goldberg from the US.

- 1 Borman, Laurie D.: ALA and German Library Association Sign Agreement, American Libraries Magazine Blog, 20 August 2014, <<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/ala-and-german-library-association-sign-agreement/>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.
- 2 Jansen, Guido; Riedel, Susanne: Die transatlantischen Beziehungen stärken. Das BII-Projekt „Partnerland USA 2016–2019“ startet in Leipzig; zahlreiche Vorträge und Diskussionen, in: BuB 68 (2/3), 2016, p. 92-95. Online: <<https://b-u-b.de/wp-content/uploads/2016-02.pdf>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.
- 3 6. Bibliothekskongress Leipzig 2016, <<http://web.archive.org/web/20170117071408/http://bid-kongress-leipzig.de/t3/>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.
- 4 A full list of the Bibliothekartage can be found under <<https://www.bibliothekartag.de/archiv/>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

The theme for the Leipzig 2016 conference was “Library Spaces – Real and Digital”. Participants from the US, ALA President Sari Feldman and more than a dozen US librarians gave presentations on topics such as the research common spaces and services, US library space design, notable German-language collections in US libraries, scholarly publishing services, change management, and diversity and inclusion. Their PowerPoint presentations can be accessed at the open library science platform BIB OPUS Publikationsserver,⁵ and select contributions were published in a special edition of the journal “o-bib – das offene Bibliotheksjournal”.⁶ The BIB library science journal “BuB – Forum Bibliothek und Information” extended the information exchange by soliciting articles from American librarians on topics of interest, including the ACRL Information Literacy Framework, makerspaces, gaming in libraries, and German Studies in the US. The open BuB Archive now offers the full text of those articles.⁷

Events around the conference created opportunities for librarians to talk informally, and to visit libraries and landmarks in the conference cities. The American visitors to Leipzig enjoyed a reception hosted by the mayor, and a dinner at the famous Moritzbastei, built in 1551. Visitors toured the University of Leipzig Library, the Bibliotheca Albertina, one of the oldest library buildings in Germany (built in 1543), and the Leipzig branch of the German National Library (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek), which now also houses the German Music Archive. At the German National Library, they viewed an exhibition on the history of the book, and at the Museum für Druckkunst Leipzig (Museum of the Printing Arts Leipzig), they saw historic book production machinery that is still in working order.

Delegations of German librarians attended the ALA Annual Conferences in Chicago (2017) and New Orleans (2018). “Willkommenskultur,” a culture of welcoming refugees, infused the discussion of space at ALA Annual Chicago 2017, where German librarians gave well attended talks on topics including “Libraries in Germany – Venerable Book Museums or Modern Information Facilities”, “Serving Refugees: Experiences from German Libraries”, “German Academic Libraries – New Trends in Management”, and “Libraries Support Research in Germany”.

These conference encounters created a lasting sense of international community and shared values. Members of the German delegation wrote several much-appreciated articles reflecting on the conferences.⁸ Some aspects that stood out for the German visitors were the size of ALA, international celebrity guests (Hillary Clinton and Sarah Jessica Parker), and the number and diversity of presentations.

5 BIB OPUS Publikationsserver: 105. Deutscher Bibliothekartag in Leipzig 2016 = 6. Bibliothekskongress, <<https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-bib-info/solrsearch/index/search/searchtype/collection/id/16297/rows/10>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

6 o-bib 3 (4), 2016, <<https://doi.org/10.5282/o-bib/2016H4>>. A print version is also available: Brintzinger, Klaus-Rainer; Hohoff, Ulrich; Stäcker, Thomas et al. (eds.): Bibliotheksräume – real und digital. Bibliothekskongress, Leipzig 2016, zugleich 105. Deutscher Bibliothekartag, Münster 2017 (o-bib Sonderband 3).

7 BuB PDF-Archiv, <<https://b-u-b.de/archiv/>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

8 Klausner, Hella: Partnerland USA. Deutsche Delegation auf der ALA-Jahreskonferenz, BuB Blog, 28 July 2017, <<https://b-u-b.de/ala-jahreskonferenz-2017/>>, last accessed 22 July 2019; Klausner, Hella: German Delegation Returns Energized from the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, in: International Leads 31 (3), 2017, p. 1-3; Brahms, Ewald; Harbeck, Matthias; Horstmann, Karl-Wilhelm et al.: Bericht über die 2017 American Library Association Annual Conference and Exhibition, June 22-27, Chicago, in o-bib 4 (3), 2017, p. 113-121, <<https://doi.org/10.5282/o-bib/2017H3S113-121>>.

Social events of note were the ALA International Reception held in the Winter Garden of the iconic Chicago Public Library, and the architectural cruise through the heart of Chicago, where they were invited guests of the European Studies Section, Association of Research Libraries (ACRL ESS).⁹ The 2018 ALA Annual conference in New Orleans deepened everyone’s understanding of German librarians’ refugee service initiatives, with talks on “Learning German in the Virtual Classroom”,¹⁰ and “Library Building Design in Germany”.



Fig. 1: German delegation at the ALA International Reception in Chicago. Photo: Hella Klausner

Additionally, the BII collaborated with the Goethe-Institut’s “Librarian in Residence” program to offer experts from Germany an opportunity to deepen the dialogue with American colleagues through a four-week stay in the US. The focus of the residency was different for each year, and included library programs for refugees (2016), the UN Sustainability Agenda 2030 (2017), and space design in American academic libraries (2018). Stipend recipients reported on their findings at subsequent

9 WessWeb of the European Studies Section (ESS), <<https://wessweb.info/>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

10 Expertenwissen aus Baden-Württemberg für die USA, BuB Blog, 21 september 2018, <<https://b-u-b.de/expertenwissen-aus-baden-wuerttemberg-fuer-die-usa/>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

German library conferences,¹¹ and on the BII website.¹² ALA offered additional opportunities for finding project partners through its German-US Librarian Exchange platform.¹³

Webinars are a natural tool for international collaboration, and organizers held several successful virtual meetings. The October 2016 webinar provided information about the existing Sister Libraries partnerships,¹⁴ and encouraged libraries new to the idea to explore possible collaborative projects. In May 2018, the International Relations Round Table (IRRT) organized a webinar as part of its online initiatives;¹⁵ the topic was “Libraries in Germany Serving Immigrants and Refugees”. In April 2019, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) collaborated on a webinar to encourage libraries to consider the “Benefits of International Exchange Programs”.¹⁶

The connections created by the partnership agreement also contributed to another project, planned independently: the Frankfurt Symposium, held in Frankfurt, Germany, in 2017 that drew 120 librarians from 10 countries. “New Directions for Libraries, Scholars, and Partnerships”¹⁷ was sponsored by the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) based in Chicago, IL, and two of its global projects, the Collaborative Initiative for French Language Collections (CIFNAL) and the German-North American Resources Partnership (GNARP). BII and BuB helped with publicity in Germany, and BII provided welcome stipends for US attendees.¹⁸

The long reach of the US/Germany partnership project even extends into the next decade, as the Frankfurt Symposium will be followed up by an international workshop in Fiesole, Italy on the “New Shape of Sharing: Networks, Expertise, Information” (11 to 14 May 2020).¹⁹ Topics include new models for collaborative collection development and services, awareness of a growing range of content and format types, and the evolving role of libraries and librarians in the research process.

11 Fricke, Fee-Saskia: LiR – Librarian in Residence, Raumkonzepte, Wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken, Benutzung, Partnerland USA, BID, 7 December 2018, <https://www.bi-international.de/de_DE/bericht-librarian-in-residence-2018>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

12 BID, Erfahrungen austauschen – Share Experiences, <https://www.bi-international.de/de_DE/home-bii?tag=17>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

13 BIB-ALA: German-U.S. Librarian Exchange, <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/iro/iroactivities/bib-ala_exchange>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

14 Webinar: Deutsch-Amerikanische Partnerbibliotheken (Sister Libraries), <<https://bibliotheksportal.de/2016/10/17/webinar-deutsch-amerikanische-partnerbibliotheken-sister-libraries/>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

15 IRRT Webinars, <<http://www.ala.org/rt/irrt/initiatives>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

16 IFLA CPDWL/NPSIG: Benefits of International Exchange Programs, Youtube, 11 April 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oa3QD5WYtUA&feature=youtu.be>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

17 Center for Research Libraries: New Directions for Libraries, Scholars, and Partnerships. An International Symposium, <<https://www.crl.edu/events/frankfurt2017symposium>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

18 For a more detailed summary of the symposium cf.: Madden, Heidi; How, Sarah; Wenzel, Sarah G.: Wenn alle Wege nach Frankfurt führen. Bibliothekare aus zehn Ländern diskutieren Möglichkeiten internationaler Kooperation auf dem Frankfurter Symposium, in: BuB 70 (1), 2018, p. 56-59, online: <<https://b-u-b.de/wp-content/uploads/2018-01.pdf>>, last accessed 22 July 2019. English version: <https://www.crl.edu/sites/default/files/event_materials/when%20all%20roads%20led%20to%20Frankfurt.pdf>, last accessed 22 July 2019.

19 Center for Research Libraries: New Shape of Sharing: Networks, Expertise, Information, <<https://www.crl.edu/events/sharing2020>>, last accessed 22 July 2019.



Fig. 2: Passing the baton of the partner country initiative from the US to the Netherlands at the 7th Bibliothekskongress in Leipzig. From left to right: ALA President Loida Garcia-Febo, BID-President Dr. Heinz-Jürgen Lorenzen, BIL-Chairwoman Barbara Lison, President FOBID Matthijs van Otegem. Photo: dbv / Janko

The era of 2016 to 2019 witnessed extraordinary professional development opportunities for many library science professionals from Germany and the US. Participants learned to understand each other's organizational structures, infrastructures, and acronyms, and found it invaluable to talk in person about the nature and organization of our both similar and varied work environments and challenges. At the formal celebration and closing ceremony, held in March 2019 at the 7th Bibliothekskongress in Leipzig, BID President Dr. Heinz-Jürgen Lorenzen and ALA president Loida Garcia-Febo thanked everyone for the many successful initiatives and diverse outcomes. Together, they welcomed Germany's new partner country, the Netherlands (2019-2022), passing the baton to Matthijs van Otegem of the Netherlands Library Forum (FOBID). Our partner program experience will continue to inspire international dialogue at our standing conferences, and there is hope of reconnecting at our respective annual meetings, or in Fiesole, Italy, in 2020.

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