



Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kunst- und Museumsbibliotheken (AKMB) – the working group of art and museum libraries in German speaking countries

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Since the beginnings of the 1990es the German art and museum libraries had to face a lot of changes – the institutions in East Germany searched help and advice in order to reorganize their work in the unified Germany, data processing and the global world of internet started to change the professional librarian work flow and the self understanding of tasks and services to be offered by archives, libraries, information and documentation centres. But who should be asked for help and advice? Who could be the partner, in order to formulate the needs, to organize training within this special area?

Existing Groups

An informal group, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kunstbibliotheken (AKB - Working Group of Art Libraries) was and is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation – <http://www.dfg.de>) in the context of purchasing scientific literature for German institutions participating in the "national distributed library plan" (Sondersammelgebietsplan). This approach was developed to be able to offer the research literature for German research after the second world war completely through the community of libraries as a whole. Two of these nine scientific (special) libraries (at Berlin, Cologne, Nürnberg, Munich, Florence, Rome, Heidelberg and Dresden) are museum libraries – the Art and Museum Library of Cologne and the Library of the German National Museum at Nürnberg.

Beside the AKB in the German librarian scene the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Spezialbibliotheken (ASpB – Working Group of Special Libraries) existed. This group was founded in 1946 as well as consequence of the second world war to exchange information and to establish a common catalogue of periodicals in the field of natural sciences and engineering. 1961 the name was changed to Working Group of Special Libraries. The work of this group focused more on the interests of larger libraries. The ASpB organizes a conference every two years and publishes the proceedings for her members. Today the ASpB has 645 members, among them 11 % art and museum libraries.

Furthermore concerning some subjects specialised working groups already existed – for example for libraries affiliated to parliaments and official bodies, libraries within churches. Another problem was the lack of professional training: the students had to choose between public librarianship on one hand and scientific librarianship on the other or to become another kind of information specialist. The only institution, offering training and education for special libraries at the Deutsches Bibliotheksinstitut (DBI- German Library Institute) was transferred into an association after the closing of the DBI. Other tasks of the DBI were taken over by the National Library and other large institutions.

Foundation and Structure

During the Librarian's Congress, held 1993 at Leipzig, Eberhard Slenczka, the director of the Library of the German National Museum at Nürnberg, invited interested colleagues to discuss the establishment of a new group – the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kunst- und Museumsbibliotheken – as answer to the needs of the colleagues, to promote professional exchange, advice and help as well as to be able to articulate the needs of this library type. An organization committee was nominated and this committee founded officially the AKMB in February 1995 as association at Berlin with the great support of Karl Stamm, the director of the Art and Museum Library of Cologne. The committee worked out the statutes and invited interested colleagues to the first meeting at the annual Librarian's Conference in 1995 at Göttingen.

The board of the association consists of seven persons and is elected for two years. The members of the board can be elected once again, afterwards they have to quit the board. Beside the board specialised groups can be founded in order to discuss problems intensively, to organize courses and

workshops, to develop and propose solutions within the context of German professional librarianship. At the moment two groups are active: The Data Processing Group has already organized quite a lot of training courses and supports the webmaster of the AKMB in maintaining the website of the AKMB (www.akmb.de). The Standardisation Group developed and presented standards in order to evaluate the work of art and museum libraries since 2005. After a period of discussion the standards will be reviewed and tested. This process will be supported by partners, for example the Institute of Library Science at Berlin (Humboldt University) and the Section Library and Information Studies at the University of Applied Science at Hannover. Aim is the certification through colleagues by using adequate professional criteria instead of external non-librarian criteria. Other groups worked in the field of alphabetical cataloguing, the use of classification and subject headings, international relationships, museum libraries. The groups can be reactivated, when it is needed.

Every year – normally in the context of the annual Librarian's Conference – the AKMB organizes a half day, by giving papers and the realisation of the meeting of the members. During this meeting the board reports about its activities and plans as well as the active specialised groups.

Corporate bodies can join the AKMB as well as individual members. Altogether the AKMB has 167 institutional and 67 personal members (December 2006). Between 60 and 70 % are museum libraries, the others libraries are affiliated to institutes of art history at universities, art academies, monument preservation offices, research institutes of art history, archaeology and cultural relationships. The members are not restricted to Germany – the AKMB has members in Austria and Switzerland as well as in other European countries, for example German Research Institutes in Italy and France, and in Luxembourg.

Other Activities and Services

The editorial board of the AKMB-news comprises about 10 colleagues and publishes the AKMB-news, the journal of the AKMB, twice a year (Vol. 11.2005 ff). The journal started together with the AKMB: in 1995 with two issues, afterwards three issues were published per year until Volume 10 in 2004. The subscription of the journal is part of the membership, but it is also possible to subscribe the journal as non-member. Parts of the journal are already digitized and recorded in the Art Libraries Net, the virtual special library of art history.

An important part of the work is the active cooperation with other associations and organizations within the scene of professional information specialists in Germany and abroad: AKMB members enlarge the authority file of subject headings (Schlagwortnormdatei – SWD) by the introduction of new terms. Members of the board of the AKMB participate in meetings and conferences of the Documentation Group within the German Association of Museums (Fachgruppe Dokumentation im Deutschen Museumsbund). An intensive exchange concerning data standards, the use of authority files, the boarder between librarianship, documentation and other fields is very important in order to avoid double or multiple work and to meet the needs of users / visitors within museums and their libraries in an effective way. Other partners are the Working Group of Film Libraries, the Group of Media Collections and different groups of ARLIS on the international level and much more. During the last years several study tours were organized: German colleagues visited art historical libraries in Paris, colleagues from the Netherlands and France visited German libraries. Another way is the participation the conferences of colleagues in the U.S., in the U.K. and in France.

Furthermore the AKMB offers together with the Initiative Fortbildung für Spezialbibliotheken (Initiative for Training in Scientific Special Libraries - <http://www.initiativefortbildung.de/>) two or three training courses / workshops per year. A narrow cooperation between the board of the AKMB and the head of the Initiative helps to meet here the needs of the members of the AKMB, especially museum libraries, too. In some cases more general knowledge about management, marketing in small libraries (One Person Libraries) is very helpful, but in other cases specialized seminars have to be developed and offered: for example concerning the use of software (annual workshops about the software Allegro between 1995 and 2005), the implementation of rules for formal and subject indexing in the field of arts or concerning special collections (visual archives within museum libraries, preservation of rare books as museum object) as well as digitization and management of digital information.

I have to thank all the active members of the AKMB, supporting the work by their interest and their activities. One big advantage of this quite small organization is the excellent working atmosphere and the personal engagement of all the open-minded colleagues, coming from institutions, collecting, preserving and presenting creative and cultural matters.