

## **The Ever-Changing World of Libraries: Six Years of “Treffpunkt Bibliothek” (“Meeting Point Library”)**

*Maiken Hagemeister, Guido Jansen*

### **Abstract**

Against the backdrop of massive budget cuts in many cities, towns and villages in the Federal Republic, the German Library Association decided six years ago to initiate a large-scale awareness-raising publicity campaign. The campaign managed to generate tremendous media coverage for libraries on the local, regional and national level, to increase their visibility across the country, and to alert decision-makers and stakeholders on all levels to library-related issues.

### **1 Introduction**

A few years ago, it was becoming clear to both librarians and their customers that the nature of public libraries was changing. They were no longer just places with long rows of shelves crammed with fiction and non-fiction books and a few board games. Over the years, they had become a forum for storytelling, debating, working, learning and playing. Of course, libraries were still providing opportunities to borrow items in nearly any media available. However, increasingly, librarians were organising author events, developing workshops, arranging guided tours, organising “picture book movies”, setting up learning zones, mounting concerts, curating exhibitions, providing information literacy training, getting involved in further education or creating spaces for extracurricular literary activities. To cut a long story short: Librarians were getting

---

### **Author**

Maiken Hagemeister is Head of Communications at the German Library Association, being responsible for the organisation’s media and publicity campaigns. Having graduated in political sciences, she worked in senior positions at state theatres in Hamburg, Munich and Berlin before joining the Association in 2013.

Email: [hagemeister@bibliotheksverband.de](mailto:hagemeister@bibliotheksverband.de)

Guido Jansen is Head of International Co-operation at the German Library Association having joined the organisation in 2013. He previously worked for a number of years in international cultural relations on topics such as migration, inclusion and diversity.

Received 20 May 2014

Accepted 7 June 2014

used to dealing with a big audience and to making their presence felt in the public sphere.

On a regular basis, they invited most of the population in their immediate locality and across all age groups to attend events. Their brand-new, universally accessible, barrier-free libraries never asked high admission fees, and were open to everybody. During the past twenty years, our libraries had reinvented themselves from scratch. Realising the contradiction between this achievement and the continuing cuts to library budgets, the idea of the campaign “Treffpunkt Bibliothek” was conceived and put onto a sound footing thanks to sponsorship by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research.

## **2 Background**

The campaign made this change visible, not by requiring the participants to do more work, but by providing a framework to promote the new portfolio of library activities more effectively and at a national level. The German Library Association printed posters so that even the tiniest local library could advertise its events professionally, issuing attractive invitations and hand-outs and presenting their activities and themselves to their stakeholders and sponsors in local government in a new, more appealing light.

The central element of the campaign was an action week in October. Over a period of six years, the action weeks saw more than 5,000 events organised each year by German libraries. Substantial coverage in local media made the campaign grow. Journalists reported on the new services offered by libraries and about the events with prominent authors; they interviewed mayors on the development of their local library and analysed the action week’s impact – always coming to the conclusion that everywhere, the library was the most popular cultural institution by far.

Each year, more than 2,000 libraries participated in “Treffpunkt Bibliothek” with their activities. How was it possible to reach such a high number of institutions? On one side, the German Library Association was able to rely on a well-oiled members’ network. On the other, there was a range of potent partners, including the system of State Service Centres for Public Libraries, the library supplier EKZ, Borromäusverein (a Catholic library association), Sankt-Michaelsbund (a Catholic publishing House), the Protestant Literature Portal and professional publishers Dinges & Frick. By consequence, the campaign was able to trickle down even into the smallest communities.

## **3 Partnerships and promotion**

For the Academic Libraries of Germany, “Treffpunkt Bibliothek” provided an excellent opportunity to engage in partnerships with other libraries in their region. For instance, in “Long Nights of the Library” they were able to jointly showcase the services available in a modern academic library, to present their special collections and archives and to impress the public by displaying priceless manuscripts and incunabula.

---

A central Internet platform was established as a one-stop-shop, enabling visitors to browse through the entire range of events whilst providing librarians with professionally made promotional material (such as advertisements, posters, postcards and bookmarks) for downloading. At an early stage, the Association approached well-known library lovers among German celebrities who were willing to lend their faces to the cause. Whether TV presenters Marietta Slomka or Ralph Caspars, the actress Iris Berben, the highly popular authors Rafik Schami or Wladimir Kaminer or the acclaimed chef Tim Mälzer, they are all enthusiastic users of libraries and made tremendous contributions to the campaign by sharing stories about their favourite library hang-outs. The VIP champions of the campaign generously allowed us to use their statements for advertisements in newspapers and magazines, they participated in panel debates in libraries or gave readings from their favourite books.

In fact, they gave to this initiative much more than just their looks and their fame: their stories reflected the basic concept of the “Library for All”. The US-American/German entertainer and comedienne Gayle Tufts described the impact of libraries on her life as follows:

*If it wasn't for my mum who got me my first library card at the age of four, I would not be in Europe today. Libraries open new worlds and introduce new opportunities.*

(Tufts, 2013)

Prof. Karlheinz Brandenburg, Director of the Fraunhofer Institute for Digital Media Technology, explained the intellectual benefit of the library for academia: “From my own experience, I know: one day at the library brings a host of new ideas” (Brandenburg, 2013).

In order to ensure a supra-regional relevance of the key messages of “Treffpunkt Bibliothek”, the Association developed a well thought-through media and communication strategy. The action week was launched with a nation-wide publication, the *Report on the State of the Libraries*. Adapting the attention-grabbing title *Report on the State of the Nation*, this publication summarised the most important facts and figures, and topics and priorities of the library community in Germany. At a press conference hosted by a different library each year, journalists from local and national media could familiarise themselves with the situation of the libraries and their users, using the data and the information about library priorities in their articles and interviews.

A subsequent study tour for selected press representatives brought journalists into a wide range of different libraries each year, illustrating the priorities of the Association with concrete examples from libraries. The resulting press coverage was varied, but it unanimously expressed great esteem for the work and the benefit of libraries, and it endorsed maintaining and supporting these institutions. For instance, Frank Pergande wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in autumn 2012:

*Still, libraries are not quiet halls where books slowly collect dust. They remain the most extensively utilised facilities for culture and education in Germany.*

---

(Pergande, 2012)

In addition to traditional press work, each year around ten media partners were recruited who agreed to feature prominent “Treffpunkt Bibliothek” advertisements for free. The newspapers *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Ostseezeitung*, and the broadcasters *Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg* and *Nordwest Radio* all helped to communicate the campaign’s messages to users and stakeholders.

A weekly topical content service with text and images relevant to their work supported the libraries in their media and communication activities and continues to provide a rich and diverse resource for statements and interviews. Each year, new video clips and teaser images in a variety of styles were produced which could be used beyond the campaign.

#### 4 Celebrating excellence

A final, very prominent building block of “Treffpunkt Bibliothek” is the federal award “Bibliothek des Jahres / Library of the Year” which is awarded on 24 October i.e. International Library Day. Endowed by the prestigious *Zeit Foundation* and the German Library Association, this prize celebrates the outstanding work of one library every year and rewards its achievements with a donation of €30,000. By turning the spotlight on particularly innovative libraries year after year, this award alone has made an invaluable contribution towards public awareness libraries – and what they could look like in the future.

#### References

- Brandenburg, K. (2013) Prof. Karlheinz Brandenburg, Institutsleiter Fraunhofer-Institut für Digitale Medientechnologie (IDMT) *In: Treffpunkt Bibliothek Aktionspaten von Treffpunkt Bibliothek*. URL: [http://www.treffpunkt-bibliothek.de/prominente\\_fuer\\_bibliotheken](http://www.treffpunkt-bibliothek.de/prominente_fuer_bibliotheken) [accessed 21.05.2014].
- Pergande, F. (2012) Der diskrete Charme der Bibliotheken, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 October 2012, 3.
- Tufts, G. (2013) Gayle Tufts, Entertainerin *In: Treffpunkt Bibliothek Aktionspaten von Treffpunkt Bibliothek*. URL: [http://www.treffpunkt-bibliothek.de/prominente\\_fuer\\_bibliotheken](http://www.treffpunkt-bibliothek.de/prominente_fuer_bibliotheken) [accessed 21.05.2014].

---

#### Open access and copyright

*Library and Information Research* is an open access journal. A freely available copy of this paper may be downloaded from the journal’s website: <http://www.lirjournal.org.uk>.

Copyright and associated moral rights in works published in *Library and Information Research* are retained by the author(s) but this paper may be used freely, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings.