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## User Studies to Support Library Effectiveness in Germany

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## the corporate authors. So, if you know what a huge amount of work woolsbill will be USER STUDIES TO SUPPORT LIBRARY EFFECTIVENESS IN GERMANY

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One of the main functions of user studies is to bring a good future to libraries. I hope that user studies will be successful, but I think that in the last three decades there were only very few steps in this direction.

What I have to report today is methods, projects and results of user studies in Germany to improve library effectiveness. This is the main goal, but whether we will reach it and be successful is not yet certain. After some privately-funded user studies, the German Research Association decided to finance two major projects on user studies in Germany. One is a descriptive study, the first try to obtain data about user behaviour in German libraries. The second is a more detailed study.

I would like to show you the goals briefly concerning the first study - the more general one. The goals are the description of more general data of user behaviour in German university libraries, and then to distinguish general data and local data, that is general user behaviour which would be relevant in all libraries and locally influenced data. The third goal is to develop an easily and commonly used instrument for data gathering. Naturally, this first study must include almost all fields of library activity - circulation, cataloguing, reading-rooms, copying services, book collections, the question of the relationship of a central library and decentralized departments, and so on.

I would like to make a few comments about the methods of this project. Because we aimed at a general study, we had to have a large basis to build on. We had more than 60 people who were not interviewed, but who had to fill in a written questionnaire. This was done only in university libraries because of technical reasons. You cannot interview all kinds of people with the same questionnaire. For example, people who come from the city-lawyers and so forth have different questions than students. As a result we only interviewed the students. In two universities members of staff were also interviewed. These university libraries were the library of the Free University in Berlin, and the university libraries in Hannover, Frankfurt, Tübigen, Hamburg and Karlsruhe. We had two technical university libraries: the university libraries of Hannover and Karlsruhe. We wanted to find out if there was a different user habit in technical libraries than in other university libraries.

There were a very large number of questions: 165. We had to split the questionnaire into three parts with one special section for members of staff. We used a random sample of users according to the user files in the libraries.

I would like to show you the second project too and then some conclusions. I will only mention a few selective results because the time is not long enough to present the entire report.

The main goal of the second project was to find out the literature search habits of students. Students are the main clientele of all scientific libraries. In detail, the goals were to obtain specific data on the use of search instruments. These instruments included both things made within the library, such as catalogues, and materials made outside the library, such as bibliographies which are used in libraries as search instruments, the information desk, open access stacks, systematic order of books, and so on. The main types of data gathered were information available before the search, the information the user brings with him before he begins his search in the library, then the search strategy itself, the sequence of instruments he uses, how long he consults some instruments, and

afterwards the degree of success.

The methodology. This is a more detailed research project. Therefore, we could only interview a limited number of people. We had to restrict ourselves to 2,000 interviews. This means 5,000 search cases. The number of libraries was a bit greater than in the first study. We used both university and state libraries. The University libraries were Braunschweig, Frankfurt, Regensburg, Konstanz, Göttingen, one normal state library, Munich, and Frankfurt which is a state library which has more of the function of a university library. The data-gathering methods were more distinctive: written questionnaires, interviews, open and hidden observations. Here, the random sample was taken from the number of users who came to the library, not according to the library files. We wanted to know actual use, and this you can only observe or interview at the catalogue or other instruments where the students are searching.

There are some principle questions for decision-making in German libraries. Some of the questions are common to libraries in other countries too, but some are not. For example, the question of open access - closed access. We could have a much longer list of principal questions; this is just a selection. We have first the library structure, reading-rooms, and the structure of the reading-rooms. The traditional structure is a central reading-room for humanities, or even only one reading-room for all subjects, and in some libraries, a few special reading-rooms. There are now libraries which have special reading-rooms for a lot a subjects. This principal question was researched. Then, open access - closed access. After World War I, the principal decision was taken that almost all German libraries were to have closed stacks. In the nineteenth century, most of the stacks were open as in the Anglo-Saxon countries. After World War I, the librarians decided not to arrange the books according to a subject system. This principal question has been revised now.

Secondly, catalogue structure. For example, the introduction of the new cataloguing rules according to the new international agreements. Then, the question of short-title catalogues – if we have a short-title catalogue, which kind of title elements can we leave out? – and the old question of subject cataloguing. There are heavy doubts that subject cataloguing is useful, or that at least one type of subject cataloguing – the systematic catalogue – is still useful because it is quite an expensive catalogue. The people who get the most money have to make these kinds of catalogues. The physical form of catalogue is essentially a question of computer printout, microform, hard copy and so on. Thirdly, the general question of library structures in universities.

Now I will try to show you some results and some possible consequences for some of these questions, according to the results of the user studies mentioned. The question of the structure of reading-rooms can be solved by establishing decentralized readingrooms. Three-quarters of the respondents of the questionnaire desired this type of reading-room structure. It seems that the time of the old central reading-room of German scientific libraries should be over now. Concerning open access and closed stacks, one finds that libraries with closed stacks need at least a good alphabetical catalogue as this is normally the only access to the stacks for the users. When we checked the search results for open stacks with alphabetical catalogue or without alphabetical catalogue and compared these with closed stacks and search by alphabetical catalogue, we found that open access is more successful and that the alphabetical catalogue combined with open access, that is with the books organized systematically, had a success rate of almost one hundred percent. An alphabetical catalogue alone had only a success rate of sixty-six percent, that is, two-thirds of the cases. If there is open access, the subject catalogue is almost never used. It may be that if a library has open access with the books arranged in a systematic order, it does not need a subject catalogue, and if it is to have a subject catalogue, at least not a systematic catalogue. We will come to this problem later. There were some different results from the two open access libraries, Regensburg and Konstanz. These differences are to be explained by the local situation.

In Germany, the old cataloguing rules had some special features, above all the word order and the introduction of corporate authors. We tried to find out if corporate authors are

useful, and we found that users, before they begin their search, know only one percent of the corporate authors. So, if you know what a huge amount of work it is to bring the corporate authors into the catalogue, then you can understand what it means if only one percent of the users know a corporate author. If they do not know a corporate author, they cannot use it for a search. Maybe we can change this, in the meantime we can reduce the amount of work on corporate authors in alphabetical cataloguing.

I mentioned earlier that systematic catalogues are really not very useful. We had libraries which had both subject catalogues as systematic catalogues and by key words. If it is possible at all, users use the subject catalogue by key words. This is a pity because the state library in Munich recreated its systematic catalogue - the whole system - after World War II, with a lot of money, and especially there the systematic catalogue is not used.

The short-title catalogue. It is clear that if we want to make a short-title catalogue, we should leave out the sub-title, even the publisher and, perhaps, the place of publication and some other elements. The users do not know them and cannot use them as identifying elements for identifying the title.

The physical form of the catalogue. We have an example in Regensburg where we carried out the second study twice. The first time, the Regensburg catalogue was a computer printout, a hard copy, and the second time, the catalogue was on microform. The use of the alphabetical catalogue in Regensburg increased so much after the introduction of the microform catalogue that in spite of the fact that Regensburg is an open access library, the alphabetical catalogue is used almost as heavily as in the other closed access libraries. The final point, the structure of the library, I shall have to leave out as there is not enough time left.

official quarters pointing out that some form of restriction on growth might be not only