

## **Taking the Mountain to all the Mohammeds: Elements of Embedded Librarianship at a Large University**

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# TAKING THE MOUNTAIN TO ALL THE MOHAMMEDS – ELEMENTS OF EMBEDDED LIBRARIANSHIP AT A LARGE UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

The prototypical embedded librarian can be found at a small, often one-person library belonging to a university department or a research institution. But central libraries in large university systems stand to gain from the idea of embedded librarianship.

Three years ago, the library system of the University of Münster underwent considerable structural changes to move from a two-track system to a functional one-track one. The core element of this process was a changeover in the administrative responsibility for the faculty libraries' personnel: they are no longer employees of their respective faculties or institutes, but of the central library, which now is responsible for the management of all 97 faculty libraries. While this helped to improve the libraries' processes and services, it also provided all staff members with more far-ranging opportunities to work in different areas of the library system. Furthermore, it brought a big change for some of the former subject specialists: they became unit managers and are now responsible for the libraries in "their" faculties – they evolved from subject librarians to liaison librarians.

This kind of restructuring – demanding intensive discussions, preparations, effort, and some compromise – is still quite rare for German two-track university libraries. However, the experiences made during these first years of transformation are promising. Alongside several other large-scale and small-scale measures, e.g. for collection development, information literacy, or publications, the librarians were able to build closer ties to their students and scientists, but also to their fellow librarians.

The paper will give an outline of the organisational change process and the outcomes for the library's subject services.

## Keywords

university library, structural change, one-track/two-track library systems, functional one-track library systems, subject librarians, liaison librarians, German universities

## Münster University and its library system

Three years ago, the library system of the University of Münster underwent considerable structural changes to move from a "classic" two-track system to a functional one-track one.

Before we look at what triggered this transformation and how the change process was handled, let me introduce the two institutions.

The Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität (WWU) Münster is one of the biggest universities in Germany: founded in 1780 and again in 1902, its 15 faculties cover the main scientific disciplines apart from engineering and veterinary medicine. 120 subjects are taught in over 280 degree courses; about 670 professors and academic staff of 5,000 supervise 44,000 students. There is no central university campus in Münster: about 220 buildings are spread throughout the entire city.

The University and Regional Library (ULB) Münster is the central literature and information supply institution for the WWU. The library is open to all students and staff of Münster University and of the University of Applied Sciences Münster that has about 14,500 students and 1,000 staff members.

The ULB is also the legal deposit library for the province of Westphalia, collecting literature and information published in and about this region. Therefore, it is also open to all residents of Münster and other users interested in the collections and services, serving not only the scientific research, but also education and other interests.

The library was founded in 1588 as the library of a Jesuit seminary; in 1780 it was transferred to the university. The system consists of one central library and about 100 departmental and institute libraries. The collections amount to 6 million volumes with 2.6m located at the central library and 3.4m at the decentralized libraries. A team of 248 colleagues for 182 FTE (full-time equivalents) is in charge of the library system.

## Where we were in 2013

### Libraries

Four years ago, the central library and four branch libraries with 170 employees formed the centre of the library system. Some of the then 130 autonomous departmental libraries were run by a trained library staff of 70; small libraries were looked after exclusively by student assistants or secretaries.

In 1989, there were 210 libraries. Accordingly, the past 30 years saw a reduction by about 40%. Nevertheless, the system still suffered from the disadvantages of a “classic” two-track<sup>1</sup> construction:

- A very heterogeneous “library landscape”: small or big libraries (from 700 to 165,000 volumes), several big or many small libraries per faculty (from 1 to 19 libraries), small or big acquisition budgets (from 500 € to over 250,000 €), several or no (trained) staff, more or less experience in running a decentralized library, well or less well organized libraries;
- Different conditions in the different faculties and institutes: stronger affinity with printed than electronic materials or vice versa, high or low status of the libraries at their institutes or departments, more or less involvement in the management and development of the libraries;
- Money wasted due to suboptimal workflows and double acquisitions or subscriptions;
- Fragmented use of premises while the university’s space requirements steadily increased.

Factors like these lead to suboptimal conditions regarding cost structures and efficiency. But the WWU being a non-campus university, students, lecturers, and researchers were used to having direct access to “their” – printed – literature, and most of the facilities were not about to change to bigger buildings that are capable of hosting several libraries under one roof.

### Subject librarians

In the central library, 17 subject librarians were responsible for 42 subjects. As the subject services were not their only tasks, the time available for “their” subjects varied between about 5% and 80% of their working hours, amounting to less than 50% on average. This left most of the subject librarians with not enough time for what they wanted to do for their subjects.

While there were strong relations to some departments or institutes and their libraries, in most cases there was only little contact to the institutes. Thus the subject librarians did not know exactly what their user groups needed and what the institutes’ libraries were like; the users, on the

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of German one- and two-track library systems see e.g. Bauer (2004).

other side, were not aware of all the different services the libraries offered – not to mention the mere existence of subject librarians.

For some subjects, the website of the central library offered thematic guides with a wide range of information, but, for most subjects, it only provided some links to the most important databases and the respective institute libraries; for some subjects, the librarians could check all available lists and catalogues of new publications for collection building, while some only had time to react to acquisition requests by users; and so on and so forth.

Due to the discontent with all these aspects, the subject librarians started thinking about how to change the structure of the ULB subject services in 2011.

## **The reform of 2014**

### **Why, when and how it began**

So, in 2013, there was dissatisfaction in the university library with the disadvantage of the two-track system and with the structure of subject services, but there were also some ideas on how to tackle some of these problems.

Meanwhile, the university came under economic pressure: in 2011, an analysis by the state audit office demanded structural changes in all two-track university library systems in North Rhine Westphalia to cut costs, and in 2012, the WWU ran into a tight budget that required extensive consolidation.

The WWU rectorate appointed seven expert working groups tasked with developing short-, medium-, and long-term measures to optimize processes all over the university and thus save costs:

1. Organizational Structures 1 (faculty organization & administration)
2. Organizational Structures 2 (central administration)
3. Personnel Costs
4. Structure of the Library System
5. Structure of Information Technology Services
6. Structure of the Universities' Workshops
7. Overhead Costs

The groups started working in November 2012 and handed in their reports in March 2013.

### **The working group “Structure of the WWU Library System”**

The group dedicated to the library system teamed up the WWU Vice Rector for Teaching and Studies with two members of the university libraries' board of directors, three professors as faculty representatives, and two directors of other university libraries that had gone through similar changes.

The group was tasked with developing a new structure to move the library system of Münster University towards a functional one-track-system while complying with demands of teaching and research as well as technological change and progress.

The group identified three key topics for saving costs and improving services:

#### **1. Standardizing acquisitions**

While a central cataloguing office had already been monitoring the libraries' cataloguing in the central ULB catalogue for years, the libraries had their own workflows for buying media. Standardizing these processes could improve the quality of the provision of library resources and accounting. A survey over all journal subscriptions held in the institutes and the central library could reveal duplicate subscriptions that could be cancelled, thus saving costs and administrative expenses. This effect could be increased by concentrating on electronic media both for journals and for books and by improving the terms and conditions of media pur-

chases: a large library system can negotiate differently than dozens of single libraries.

## **2. Uniting the libraries' personnel**

While the ULB had the specialist oversight for aspects like cataloguing, it did not have the authority to issue directives to the trained staff of the decentralized libraries. A changeover of the administrative responsibility for the faculty libraries' personnel would ensure the same conditions and possibilities<sup>2</sup> for the staff members of all libraries. Furthermore, by grouping decentralized colleagues into service teams, smaller libraries without trained staff could be looked after more easily, and for the many one-person libraries stand-ins could be more easily organized.

## **3. Reducing the number of decentralized libraries**

As mentioned above, most of the WWU buildings were not about to change. However, when institutes move to new or refurbished buildings, it should be an objective to merge libraries where possible, considering the subjects involved and the available space. Not only would libraries without trained staff profit from uniting the management of several small libraries in one team, the flow of information and the exchange of expertise and experience would also be reinforced – accordingly developing libraries as attractive learning environments with a good selection of print and electronic media would be supported.

From these key topics, the working group deduced eight recommendations:

1. Pooling the libraries' trained staff under the auspices of the central library
2. Coordinating electronic journals and databases
3. Extending the supply of electronic journals ("e-only")
4. Implementing university-wide use of the standard acquisition software
5. Reducing decentralized libraries & strengthening bigger libraries
6. Coordinating opening hours of libraries
7. Completing the retrospective conversion in 2017
8. Setting up a standing committee for library & information infrastructure

The university's rectorate decided to follow these recommendations in the summer of 2013.

## **Negotiations with the faculties**

To put the recommendations into practice, the ULB started negotiations with the 15 faculties.

Different faculties – that meant different status quos and starting points: an open atmosphere vs. fear and refusal, varying opinions on how to manage a library, big or tight faculty budgets, and so on.

After 3–5 meetings per faculty over the span of 1.5 years, the negotiations resulted in signed contracts between the ULB and each faculty consisting of two parts. A general agreement about the rights and the responsibilities of the faculties and the ULB records aspects like size and accessibility of the facilities, responsibilities for budgets for media and for student assistants, managing acquisitions, or responsibilities for running the libraries. An economic plan specifies figures about the libraries' collections, personnel, number of student assistants, opening hours, type of cataloguing, and the like.

Each year, the ULB invites the faculties to talk about the contracts with the aim of checking whether any parameters have changed, the level of satisfaction with the situation, and, if necessary, measures to be taken. Most faculties have declined the invitation in the last two years, being content with the current situation and feeling no need for discussions.

## **The new ULB department "Academic Library Services"**

One of the key elements of the reform was "pooling" the staff members of all libraries.

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<sup>2</sup> HR development at the ULB covers 14 fourteen tools and functional areas for example flexitime, training, job rotation, or health management. See e.g. Tröger (2014) and ULB Münster (2015c).

However, there was a problem: the organizational structure of the central library was not suited to taking in 63 new colleagues (+ 30%) and 100 libraries. The subject services formed one single unit without any subdivisions in a department called “Academic Services”, and the small team in charge of controlling the central cataloguing was part of the acquisitions department.

Thus, a new department for academic library services was established. Its five units divide the 15 faculties according to “subject kinship”:

<p><b>1. History, Theology, Art</b>          Fac 1 Protestant Theology          Fac 2 Catholic Theology          Fac 8 History and Philosophy          Fac 15 University of Music          31 libraries</p>	<p><b>2. Languages, Literatures, Cultures</b>          Fac 9 Philology          14 libraries  <i>Low Countries Studies = special collection (FID Benelux) with 1 library</i></p>
<p><b>3. Mathematics, Natural Science, Medicine</b>          Fac 7 Psychology/Sport Sciences          Fac 10 Mathematics and Computer Science          Fac 11 Physics          Fac 12 Chemistry and Pharmacy          Fac 13 Biology          Fac 14 Geosciences          22 libraries  <i>Fac 5 Medicine = separate department with 14 libraries</i></p>	<p><b>4. Educational &amp; Social Sciences</b>          Fac 6 Educational and Social Science          4 libraries</p> <hr/> <p><b>5. Law &amp; Economics</b>          Fac 3 Law          Fac 4 Business and Economics          11 libraries</p>

Table 1: Structure of the new ULB department “Academic Library Services”

As an example for one of these five units, let us take a look at the one for the modern philologies, representing the biggest of the 15 faculties:

<p><b>Subjects</b>          Book Studies          English Studies          General and Comparative Literary Studies &amp; Linguistics          German Studies          Middle Eastern &amp; Oriental Studies          Nordic Studies          Romance Studies          Slavic Studies</p>	<p><b>WWU Faculty</b>          Faculty 9: Philology          About 10,000 students          22 BA courses          26 MA courses          4 Graduate Schools</p> <p><b>Libraries</b>          14 libraries          707,000 volumes          Staff of 12</p>
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Table 2: Unit “Languages, Literatures, Cultures” within the department “Academic Library Services”

Each of the five subject units is responsible for its staff members, libraries, and subject services. By and large, this transformation process had to be done with the personnel at hand: only one new subject librarian – who has since then taken on other duties – and two librarians (with fixed-term contracts up to 2018) for the central cataloguing “task force” joined the team.

Five of the former subject librarians run the units of the new department: they are now the central contact for students and academic staff for all questions regarding the subjects, the library

collections, and the services of the libraries – they transformed from being “only” subject librarians to being subject and liaison librarians.

A sixth subject librarian supports the units Educational & Social Sciences Educational & Social Sciences and Law & Economics with a number of hours per week. All other colleagues who had subject tasks before the reform have handed them over to the new department, so that they can concentrate on their other duties.

The team monitoring the central cataloguing is no longer part of the acquisitions department. Instead it now forms the sixth unit of the academic library services department: it has come closer to the decentralized libraries in the ULB organizational chart, too.<sup>3</sup>

The new department has a structure that matches the diversity of the library system while enabling fast and efficient decisions. It is a solid base for our way towards a functional one-track library system.

## Comparable reforms at other German universities

According to library statistics, there are 56 one-track and 24 two-track libraries in Germany (DBS 2015). All of the two-track systems more or less suffer the same drawbacks – so it comes as little surprise that there have been several efforts in the last decades to change at least some elements of the libraries to arrive at functional one-track systems.

Examples are the libraries of the universities of Berlin (Technische Universität, TU), Dresden, Frankfurt am Main, Freiburg, Gießen, Heidelberg, Leipzig and Marburg. For an overview of the developments and for further reading see Bauer (2004), Dugall & Gärtner (2014), Klein (2014), Martin-Konle (2015), Probst & Balzuweit (2014), Reuter (2003 & 2014), or Sühl-Strohmenger (2014).

The transformation processes of Heidelberg and Dresden have served as role models for the Münster project with intense advice by and consultation with the respective library directors.

## Where we are now in 2017

Looking back at the eight recommendations of the working group “Structure of the WWU Library System”, we can see that most of these goals have been reached:

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1. Pooling the libraries’ trained staff under the auspices of the central library	✓
2. Coordinating electronic journals and databases	✓
3. Extending the supply of electronic journals (“e-only”)	✓
4. Implementing university-wide use of the standard acquisition software	✓
5. Reducing decentralized libraries & strengthening bigger libraries	✓
6. Coordinating opening hours of libraries	☑
7. Completing the retrospective conversion in 2017	☑
8. Setting up a standing committee for library & information infrastructure	✗

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*Table 3: The eight recommendations of the library system working group 2013 and their status 2017*

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As a possible result of the increased use of the standard acquisition software and the coordination of subscriptions of electronic journals and databases, costs for acquisitions may have been cut both in the central and in the decentralized libraries – or the money could have been spent on other media that were not previously affordable. We did not monitor our figures and we do

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<sup>3</sup> For more information about the new department and the reform, see ULB Münster (2014, 2015a, and 2015b).

not have insights into the institutes' budgets.

There had been efforts to coordinate the subscriptions of e-journals and databases before the reform. Together with the shift towards electronic media, these activities helped to intensify the centralisation process.

As the opening hours of the decentralized libraries mostly depend on how many student assistants the institutes hire for library tasks, the central library cannot freely determine the hours. However, there has been some coordination with libraries near to the central library, for example regarding opening hours late in the evening or on weekends. As a new service for users looking for available seats in WWU libraries, the ULB has introduced a live data feed showing seating availability<sup>4</sup> which will be rolled out to several big decentralized libraries.

The retrospective conversion will not be completed by the end of 2017. Most of the library collections are already fully catalogued and there have been determined efforts to care for the remaining stock. Setting up teams in charge of several libraries and agreeing on new arrangements for sharing project workloads are helpful preparations to ensure faster cataloguing.

As there has been a WWU libraries committee for years and a new committee for electronic licences has been established (see below), there is no actual need for an additional committee or a change of the existing WWU committee.

### **The library system**

The WWU library system now counts 30 libraries less than in 2014, leaving us with about 100 decentralized libraries.

Some libraries have been integrated into bigger collections, some have changed their status from institutional libraries to personal reference libraries that are no longer listed in the central catalogue nor looked after by trained staff.

In the remaining libraries, it was possible to improve routines and services thanks to intensive communication about experiences and best practice examples. For small libraries without trained librarians, "administrative alliances" handle cataloguing and issues regarding how student assistants or other institute staff run the libraries.

There are several current WWU building projects that also concern some libraries; the respective units are involved in the planning (see below).

Overall, the structure of the new department with its five subject clusters has proven useful for providing a "one stop management" for the decentralized staff and libraries on the one hand and the subject services on the other.

The budget responsibility for the decentralized libraries was not transferred to the central library, but still lies with the institutes or faculties: they decide how much they spend on their libraries, be it for acquisitions, student assistants, or the IT infrastructure. By request of the faculties, this important element of a "true" functional one-track library system – uniting not only the personnel, but also the budgets – has not been put into practice, making syndicated acquisitions difficult. That is why the central library and the faculties established an electronic licences committee (see below).

### **Personnel**

However, another important one-track element has been realized: "pooling" the trained staff in one group "under the roof" of the central library. This allows closer contacts to "the decentralized world": there is much more exchange of information, stand-ins are easier to organize, and joint training and switching jobs between the central and the departmental libraries are now possible, to name just a few aspects.

The group of subject librarians is much smaller than before (6 instead of 17). While they now

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<sup>4</sup> „ULB-Platzticker“, <https://www.ulb.uni-muenster.de/platzticker>.



also have liaison and management tasks, they were able to hand over other duties they had before the reform, giving them more time for the subjects and “their” libraries and staff.

So far, there have been no savings of personnel expenses from the point of view of the central library. On the one hand, this is due to added staff members tasked with running decentralized libraries or supporting the central cataloguing unit. On the other hand, staff members who took on more duties and more responsibility were assigned to higher pay scales, which added to the increase in costs. In the long run, we expect a reduction of up to ten full-time equivalents during the first ten years after the reform, similar to the results of other libraries.

The faculties recorded savings as, for example, some secretaries do not have to care for small libraries anymore, giving their time spent on the libraries “back” to the faculties.

## In other news: parallel developments

While we were negotiating with the faculties and establishing the new department, other activities regarding library services were launched or kept developing.

On the basis of its expertise and many years of experience in **constructing and furnishing library buildings**, the central library accompanies projects in the faculties. When the reform of 2014 began, there were several ongoing construction sites, for example for a new building for a library for Philosophy & Science of Art or for a library extension for History, as well as several renovation projects at libraries. Among the new projects that have since started are a new physics building uniting the current eleven libraries (to be opened in 2021) and a religious science campus uniting Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic Studies. It will be the biggest campus of this type in Europe when it opens in 2024 and includes a library of about 700,000 volumes. Long-running projects like these demand time and effort, but the intense discussions are a good opportunity to exchange ideas with faculties and institutes and to help them create good learning and research environments for their members.

In cooperation with the information department, some subject librarians expanded our **information literacy services**: they developed e-learning resources like online tutorials and web-quests<sup>5</sup>. In some faculties, information literacy courses held by librarians were added to the curriculum. This helped build closer contacts with both students and teaching staff.

The ULB has a large portfolio of **publishing services**: members of the WWU can publish all sorts of documents in a repository, they can publish hybrid open access books (online and in print) with a WWU series, they can edit open access journals using a local Open Journal Systems installation, or they can apply for the reimbursement of processing charges for articles in open access journals at the WWU publishing funds.<sup>6</sup> By promoting these services or supporting and advising WWU publishing projects, the subject librarians can reach out to graduates and academic staff.

As mentioned above an **electronic licences committee** was established in 2016. The WWU rectorate and each faculty sent a representative. Together with the ULB head of acquisitions, they discuss issues such as how the costs for expensive (> 5,000€) electronic media like journals, e-book packages, and databases or for the open access funds can fairly be shared between the central library and the faculties.

While information literacy or publishing are firmly established services of the ULB, the **management of research data** is a relatively new field of activity. Since 2017, the library has been setting up a range of services for the data management cycle like a WWU research data repository or advisory services for WWU scientists.<sup>7</sup> The ULB is building on experiences gained from

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.ulb.uni-muenster.de/ulb-tutor/> for an overview over the ULB information literacy services. (As of today the ULB websites are only available in German; the English version is being worked on.)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Publizieren/> for an overview over the ULB publishing services. For similar experiences on a larger scale, see e.g. Ginther, Lackner & Kaier 2017.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Forschungsdaten/> for an overview over the ULB research services.

joint research projects with the WWU Institute of Geoinformatics, for example.

Still in the initial stage is the development of **services for the digital humanities**. In March 2017, the WWU rectorate accepted a joint proposal submitted by a group of professors, the university library, and the university centre for IT infrastructure and services to establish a centre for digital humanities at the WWU. The ULB will be in charge of this centre.

By discussing and promoting these services, subject librarians and their colleagues can establish contacts with the faculties' management, they gain insights into current research and the demands of the faculties, and it helps to maintain close contacts to academic staff and research groups.

## Elements of embedded librarianship in the subject services

The prototypical embedded librarian is situated at a small, often one-person library of a university department or a research institution. But subject librarians at the central library of a large university system can also benefit from the idea of embedded librarianship if we understand it in a broad sense like "getting out of the office and closer to the users" – be this physically or virtually.<sup>8</sup>

As we have seen, the 2014 ULB reform meant a big change for the remaining subject specialists: they became unit managers, so now they are responsible not only for their subjects, but also for the colleagues and for the libraries in their faculties. Thanks to this transformation and to the other activities mentioned above, they benefit from several factors:

- **More contact**

We could define "more contact" as the essence of our transformation process: we now have more contact to our colleagues in the decentralized libraries, more contact to lecturers and scientists, and there is more cooperation in information literacy services, for example. We can participate in institutes' management boards, library committees, or working groups, and sometimes we even conduct joint research projects. Overall, there is much more exchange of information about current topics and the latest news – at both the libraries and the institutes.

- **Better collections**

As we have more information about courses and research activities and as there is more coordination of acquisitions between the central and the departmental libraries, the acquisitions for our collections better suit the demands of the different user groups. To name two examples: money that is saved by avoiding unnecessary double acquisitions can be spent on other books or media, and the tool for a systematic review of new publications of German and British publishers that we initially developed for subject librarians at the central library (see Voß 2017) can now also be used by librarians and scientists at the institutes.

- **Improved services in the departmental libraries**

Thanks to the closer contacts to the libraries and the colleagues working there, we have a better grasp of the services and activities, but also of the needs in the units' libraries. As exchanging information has become easier, ideas for new or improved services "fly" back and

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<sup>8</sup> I follow Schulte (2012, pp. 123, 128) who defines embedded librarians as "not passive bystanders, but rather, proactive partners filling information gaps" with a "variety of activities and degrees of embeddedness". This is not an entirely new concept of librarianship: "In fact, many liaison librarians already do many of the embedded librarian activities", as Schulte (2012, p. 124) notices; see e.g. Shumaker & Talley (2009), Shumaker (2012) or Jacobs (2013) for an overview over those activities. Like e.g. Jaguszewski & Williams (2013) Schulte (2012, p. 134) comes to the conclusion that "embedded" can simply mean 'engaged': "Librarians have sought to engage their customers – faculty, staff, students, business units, and the public – in a variety of ways for years. This review [of literature about embedded librarians, V.V.] found that embedded librarianship is another attempt to do just that: engage. Current literature illustrates that the phrase embedded librarianship is widely applied and could mean anything from having an online presence in a course to wholly working amid the end user group." Or, as Olin (2017) puts it: "[B]e a good colleague."

forth between the libraries and they are caught here and there when fitting. This goes from small improvements in everyday library life like templates for checkout forms or the introduction of software for managing the working hours of student assistants up to big projects like changing the shelf classification of entire libraries. The training of new staff members is now shared between the central and the decentralized libraries, with both sides profiting, and advanced trainings like cataloguing according to the RDA model can be systematically “rolled out”.

- **Influence on library buildings**

By participating in working groups for building or refurbishing projects, we can contribute our knowledge and our experiences about library buildings, library services and the users' needs. This gives us (at least some) influence on the concepts, plans, and buildings of WWU libraries.

- **More opportunities to spread the word**

As we have more contact to the different user groups – students, lecturers, researchers –, we can collect more knowledge about their different needs. Furthermore, as we know more about the departmental libraries, we have more opportunities to inform our users and our colleagues about the many services at all the libraries. As the proverbial Mohammeds don't always come to the libraries to get the information they need, it is now easier for us to take the mountain – our services – to them.

## **Conclusions: still on our way but the groundwork has been laid**

The last four years have been “a long and winding and uphill road” for the libraries and the faculties of Münster University. The restructuring of the library system demanded in-depth preparations, intensive discussions, considerable effort, and some compromise from all participants.

But along the way, most worries and fears that had been floating around especially in the departments and decentralized libraries have disappeared. The librarians at the institutes' libraries are more closely connected to their colleagues at the central library (“Finally I have a superior who understands what I am talking about!”) without losing control of “their” libraries, and workflows and services in many decentralized libraries were improved. Information transfer has become easier, as have joint trainings, stand-ins and sharing or changing workplaces. All the while, the institutes and faculties still retain “budget authority” for acquisitions.

So, as the list of the eight recommendations has shown, most goals have been reached or at least approached, and the experiences of these first years of transformation are promising: compared to other libraries that have been through similar changes the ULB has come quite far since 2014.

Based on this restructuring, the librarians and the faculties can now continue to develop the library system together: the number of libraries will decrease further, but the quality of the services will increase due to the ongoing adaptation of the transformation processes and structures.

The subject and liaison librarians will strengthen their relations with students and scientists to improve existing services and to get ideas for new ones. While in the future “classic” tasks like collection building or subject indexing might need less time thanks to technical developments, tasks like information transfer, networking, or project management will become more and more important. Becoming “advocates” and “consultants” for students and scientists, subject librarians will turn into “engaged liaisons”, as Jaguszewski & Williams (2013, p. 4, 16) call it, to help to fulfil the library's role as a central “information hub” for all its users.

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