

Libraries in Germany

2024

Issues
Figures
Demands

7 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



13 CLIMATE
ACTION



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bibliotheks
verband

Dear readers,

the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN are also relevant to the development of libraries. Libraries are not only cultural and educational hubs in which information, knowledge and digital infrastructure are readily accessible for and offered to all citizens over the long term in commerce-free settings, but are also places in which users can come together and communicate and are thus centres in which democracy can be practised.

The results of this year's elections in Germany and Europe have demonstrated that friction within society is on the increase. Forces that oppose pluralism and democracy have emerged strengthened, at least partly because of disinformation that has been rapidly disseminated through social media. It is thus necessary to have facilities open to the public where information is provided and encounters and exchanges of views are possible if social cohesion is to be maintained.

In order to counter the effects of fake news, citizens need to be urgently trained in media and information literacy to enable them to correctly evaluate the flood of data they are confronted with. It is true that democracy will survive only if individuals have the right to express their views freely – but these views must be based on facts and substantiated knowledge.

As educational partners that operate in the extracurricular sector and act as social focal points, libraries have important roles to play in this regard and – particularly in times of crisis – must thus receive the support they need.

However, the strained financial situation means that public libraries that are voluntarily supported by local authorities have come under particular pressure. Academic libraries that are core service providers to universities require that specific legal assurances are in place if they are to guarantee access to research data, the essential basis of all scholarship, in full at all times.

This report Libraries in Germany 2024 deals with topical issues that are fundamental to securing the social mandate of libraries and which require urgent action on the part of our politicians. The pledges entered in the German coalition agreement by the federal government, outlining the right of access to e-media by public libraries and the possibility of opening on Sundays, must be made reality in this legislative period. The German Library Association, as a participant in the round table discussions chaired by the Federal Commissioner for Culture and Media (BKM), is therefore fully committed to fostering the concept of fair framework conditions for e-lending and free access to e-books in libraries here.

I hope you find this report informative.

Volker Heller
Federal Chair of the German Library Association
(Deutscher Bibliotheksverband e.V. – dbv)



Image: © dbv/Mejdi El Bekri

Figures from the German Library Statistics for 2023¹

In the whole of Germany, there are more than **8,800 public and academic libraries** that were visited in excess of **166 million times** in 2023.

Range of training courses and events significantly extended

Libraries are not only there to lend out books and other items. They also offer a wide range of cultural and educational events designed to appeal to various target groups of all ages. For this purpose, they cooperate with many local partners. More than **377,000 events** were hosted by libraries in 2023; these included more than **180,000 events for children to promote reading skills and media literacy** in public libraries. **More than 460,000 persons** took part in **training courses, guided tours, teaching events and webinars** offered by academic libraries.

Digital media for academic, research and teaching purposes

From their total acquisition budget of **€ 335 million**, academic libraries invested **€ 203 million** in the **procurement of e-media** in 2023, in other words, 60.7% or well over half of the total sum. Digital media are continuing to have an increasing relevance in terms of teaching and research: **holdings** of e-media grew from 77 million in 2022 to around **84 million** in 2023.

312 million borrowings from public libraries

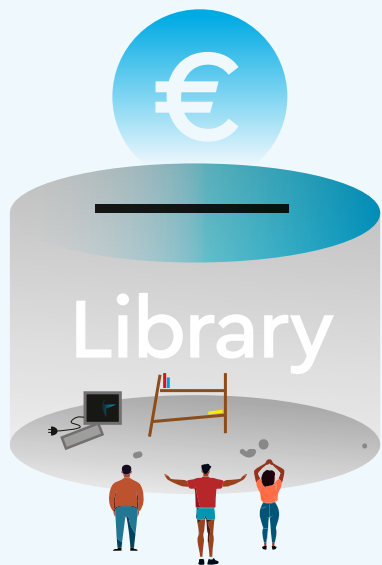
The demand for the provision of analogue media from libraries continues to be strong, despite the fact that the current widespread usage of what is available online is already of considerable relevance to the core mission of the provision of media and information to the general public. In 2023, some **312 million items** were borrowed from public libraries, **of which around 47 million of these were e-media items**.

¹ The German Library Statistics (DBS) for 2023 are only comparable to a limited extent with those for previous years because of the measures that had to be put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Source: German Library Statistics (DBS). Despite the high participation rate by libraries, the figures recorded for the German Library Statistics (DBS) make no claim to be fully comprehensive as participation is voluntary. In the 2023 reporting year, a total of 8,862 public and academic libraries sent figures to the DBS.

Libraries need future-proof funding

The financial crisis being faced by local authorities is also having an impact on libraries. This is shown by the results of the annual German survey² of the financial situation of public libraries undertaken among members of the German Library Association in 2024. After years of cutbacks and stagnating budgets, the situation of the libraries is growing critical.



Initial reports by local authorities confirm that there are likely to be major retrenchment measures in 2025. Despite the belief on the part of the government that the promotion of reading skills and media and information literacy is an essential element when it comes to boosting educational standards in Germany, and that places where people can meet and interact are urgently required to hinder social polarisation, what is actually happening is the exact opposite of what is needed.

In the survey, 29 % of the participating libraries reported that they are already being impacted by fiscal austerity measures or that they will be affected by these in future. In 2023, only 23.5 % of the responding libraries reported this to be the case.

While 14 % of participating libraries stated last year that they were subject to a global spending freeze or constrained by similar radical restrictions, the corresponding percentage in this year's survey had risen to 17 %.

In 2024, 18 % of libraries specified that their total budget had been cut by at least 10 %; the figure in 2023 was roughly 14 %. Although 66 % of libraries stressed that their budget has remained unchanged in 2024, this actually means, in view of general inflation and the increasing costs of personnel, a reduction of their budgets in real terms, so that their capacity to achieve their core cultural and educational mandates and undertake the growing number of tasks they are taking on is being undermined.

The German Library Association calls for → the federal and state governments together with local authorities to develop a concept that will ensure the future-proof financing of libraries. In times of financial difficulties, it is clear that the voluntary funding provided by local authorities is at particular risk. We must not forget that we are living in times in which education is in crisis and ideologies that are hostile to democracy and pluralism are on the rise.



² German Library Association survey of 1,395 public libraries, in May-June 2024.

Libraries can revitalise city centres

Inner city zones in Germany are increasingly in decline since the coronavirus crisis and the growth of online shopping. In city centres and particularly on Sundays, libraries have the potential to act as locations where people can meet and interact, serving as beacons that can help bring life back into inner cities.



On Sundays in particular, many city centres are deserted, populated only by desolate rows of closed shops. Public cultural and educational institutions, such as libraries, represent important centres of attraction for people.

Libraries are the most frequently visited of cultural facilities and, as such, have enormous potential when it comes to the revitalizing of bleak inner city areas. They provide all population groups with straightforward, gratuitous, commerce-free access to the diverse services they offer in the sectors of education, culture and communication.

Pilot schemes are already allowing libraries to open on Sundays and it is notable that on this day of the week they are often being used as centres for interaction with others and learning. A survey³ undertaken by the Bücherhallen Hamburg association of libraries in 2023 shows that its main library was principally visited on Sundays by young people under the age of 20 years who used it as a study space.

³ Survey of visitors on the Sunday opening of the main library of the Bücherhallen Hamburg association, 2023.

The German Library Association calls for → the urgent provision of attractive cultural and educational facilities that can serve as locations where people can come together, interact and participate in order to counterbalance the dereliction of city centres and the loss of relevance of public spaces. When proposing investments to improve inner city areas, the federal and state governments should take more targeted account of the potential represented by libraries and other cultural institutions. The German Library Association thus advocates that the German Working Time Act (ArbZG) should be amended to allow public libraries to open on Sundays.

“In the past, inner city areas were dominated by shopping facilities. The situation is changing. In future, we will be requiring more public spaces designed to enable people to get together and communicate with each other – away from the distractions of the retail trade. And libraries can act as such places. Well-frequented libraries can also enliven city centres and local districts. In common with other cultural institutions, they should also be allowed to open on Sundays.”

Helmut Dedy
Chief Executive Director of the Association of German Cities



Libraries are core elements of the educational landscape

It is your social origin that determines your educational attainments in Germany. This is the perhaps unsurprising conclusion that can be drawn from the results of the 2024 German National Report on Education. To make sure that quality education is available to all, public venues that are both reputable and readily accessible are required that offer, throughout Germany, contemporary learning environments and diverse incentives to learn.

Urban libraries as centres of public education contribute to increasing the opportunities of the less privileged to gain education and thus ensuring that social mobility is a reality. The services provided by libraries accompany individuals throughout their lives as they depart on their personal educational journeys.

As commerce-free locations, libraries are open to all and safeguard the fundamental right to freedom of information. They are established extracurricular places of learning and promote the educational process from the very beginning as partners of kindergartens and schools.

However, libraries are not mentioned in the 2024 German National Report on Education, despite the fact that they play a significant role in educational biographies.

The German Library Association calls for → the learn effect attributable to libraries to be systematically taken into account in studies undertaken by the German educational sector and libraries to be thus included in strategic educational policy planning. The consistent acknowledgement of this role will promote the urgently needed improvement in education quality and facilitate the establishment of a more equitable educational system in Germany. The states and local authorities must therefore accept that libraries are integral elements of the educational landscape and thus systematically invest in the educational services and facilities they provide.

More information:



School libraries provide everyone with chances to improve their education

In 2022, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) found that some 26% of German 15-year-olds failed to achieve the expected proficiency level in the core indicator 'Reading performance'. A lack of reading skills reduces educational attainments and thus the opportunities that young people will subsequently have when they enter the job market.

School pupils require more spaces in which they can read and learn and where they are supported in accordance with their abilities – and this should also be provided outside the classroom.

Contemporary school libraries with appropriately trained staff, diverse media holdings and suitable technical equipment can provide an optimal environment for learning while teaching and library staff can collaborate to produce individualised learning concepts for all school subjects. Hence, even during all-day schooling – a more recent innovation adopted by some schools in Germany – they can provide pupils with a high quality educational setting. Pupils with special needs or insufficient family finances depend on well-stocked school libraries to help them learn.

School libraries have a particularly beneficial effect when they are integrated in the local municipal library

system. They can profit from the existing special expertise and take advantage of the more extensive educational programmes offered by public libraries.

The German Library Association calls for → the states to provide fixed budgets to schools so that they can set up, equip and recruit staff for school libraries that meet contemporary needs and to which all pupils have access; moreover, the funding should also provide for the ongoing maintenance of these facilities. The 'Start Opportunities Programme' (Startchancen-Programm) of the federal government should also be extended to cover school libraries as elements of an optimum learning environment in schools. School supervising authorities and internal school management must no longer be prevented by questions between internal and external school supervision.

"Contemporary schooling in Germany means a full day of education and holistic support of pupils. School libraries play a diverse role in this context; as locations for learning and recreation, as places where pupils can explore, express themselves, relax or focus on something. It should be the concern of all of us to support them and make sure they are fit for our current concept of what represents good education. This is jointly endorsed by all the conference representatives of the German states."

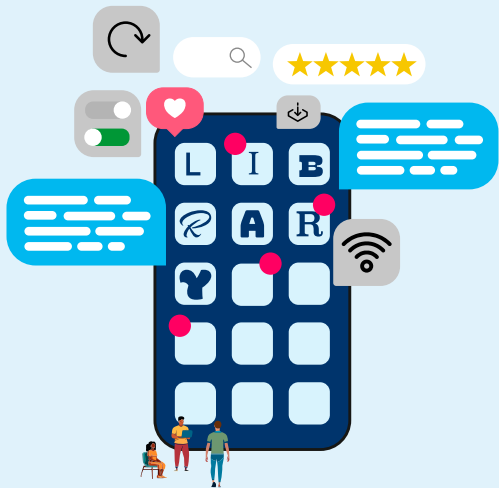
Christine Streichert-Clivot
President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK)

More information:



Libraries are indispensable for media and information literacy

The spread of digital technologies represents a major challenge for the educational system in view of the new online sources of information, the rapid dissemination of information and the flood of data that is being produced. Required, on the one hand, is the ability to use the ever-changing digital infrastructures and, on the other, the capability to discriminate between and evaluate information correctly.



According to the results of a survey undertaken by the Bertelsmann Stiftung ('Verunsicherte Öffentlichkeit'), a large section of the German public is worried about the effects that disinformation and fake news are having on the progress of democracy in Germany. Among other things, it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify the origin of information, to interpret the purpose of information and to recognise deep fakes generated with the help of artificial intelligence (AI).

Libraries are core promoters of media and information literacy. The services together with the free guidance they offer not only facilitate access to digital and analogue media but also help people categorise news items, assess the sources and detect disinformation. In workshops dealing with AI, they also assist people in using state-of-the-art digital technologies. Academic libraries contribute to resources of non-biased and fact-based information and provide verified knowledge that can serve as the basis for the formation of opinion and (political) response,

thus supporting research, scholarship and teaching. Through their role in connection with media and information literacy, libraries significantly enhance the access to information and public participation and thus help ensure the preservation of our democracy.

The German Library Association calls for → federal and state governments together with local authorities to take the challenges arising in connection with disinformation and fake news seriously and to systematically use and build on the potential offered by libraries when it comes to the promotion of media and information literacy. Networks designed to facilitate access to fact-based information and the use of digital media by the public should also receive financial backing.

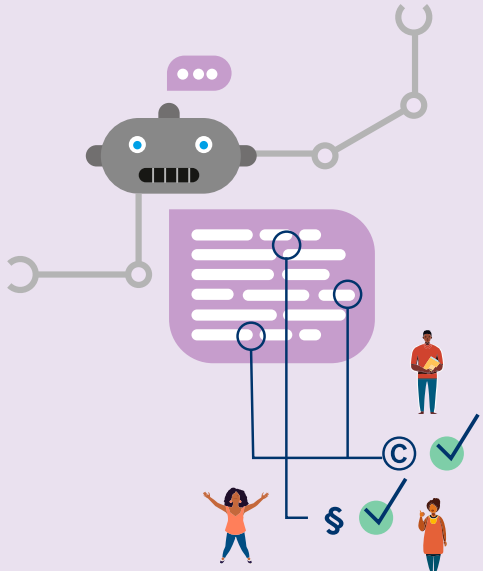
"Among the less-frequently cited aspects of our democracy are our rights of access to knowledge and to verify information. We need to take the growing risk represented by manipulated online information in the form of so-called alternative facts as a warning that it is important to protect these rights. Libraries – themselves homes of democracy in action – are where this can be promoted."

Renate Künast,
Member of the German Bundestag
Vice President of the
German Library Association (dbv)



Libraries contribute to the constructive use of AI

ChatGPT, deep fakes and AI-driven automation: the rapid developments we are witnessing in the world of artificial intelligence (AI) have not left libraries untouched. In the form of its recently adopted AI Act, the European Union has put in place the world's first comprehensive law regulating the use of artificial intelligence.



The implementation of this regulation has important repercussions for libraries in Germany. This is because libraries already use AI in a multitude of different ways; to help them with their routine tasks, such as the generation of metadata with the aid of (semi-)automated cataloguing, or to improve the user experience by, for example, providing access to chatbots or developing new research tools. The curated holdings of libraries are furthermore of considerable interest in connection with the training of generative AI. Moreover, libraries help their users learn the skills they need to use AI tools, such as ChatGPT, and understand the risks associated with AI and thus foster responsible use of AI by society in general.

From the point of view of the German Library Association, two aspects are of central relevance: existing laws relating to copyright must be amended so that libraries know that their activities are legally compliant, while the opportunities for using AI for the purposes of research must be exploited to the full.

The German Library Association calls for → the copyright laws applying to the training of generative AI for scholarly purposes to be made consistent with the existing national permits relating to text and data mining – in other words, the automated, algorithm-based evaluation of large quantities of data. In addition, AI-generated content should be clearly identified as such to provide for the necessary transparency when dealing with AI.



Libraries support science by providing access to research data

The digital revolution has resulted in the generation of immense quantities of data in vastly different forms by research and also by the commercial sector. Access to this data has significant potential for researchers.



Academic libraries have unequalled expertise in acquiring, archiving and publishing research data. The proposed Research Data Act (FDG) of the current federal government that is designed to improve access to research data is thus of paramount relevance to libraries. Included among the proposals are the introduction of a more research-friendly form of data protection in connection with the use of research data and the setting up of an independent data trust authority – the so-called Micro Data Center (MDC) – that is designed to simplify the provision of and access to research data.

At the same time, however, the plans of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) apply at present only to statistical and registry data of the government. Excluded is data relating to cultural and commercial aspects collected by federal agencies. When the final version of the law is prepared, the German Library Association hopes to see that improved access is not limited

merely to government data but also extended to that compiled by the cultural and commercial sectors. So that officially supported and private research institutes together with the public universities, their academic libraries and their researchers also come to fully benefit from the Research Data Act. This aspect must be explicitly addressed in the text of the Act.

The German Library Association calls for → academic libraries to be included among the target groups of the proposed Research Data Act. The objective of the new law must be to ensure improved access to data for all researchers.

"The German Research Data Act is designed to support data-based research. It can drive forward the change in culture necessary for the provision and use of data for the purposes of scholarship. The universities have emphatically welcomed the initiative of the federal government. What is important here is to ensure that the creation of redundant structures is avoided and that the expertise and work to date undertaken by the academic libraries are appropriately exploited."

Prof. Dr. Walter Rosenthal
President of the
German Rectors' Conference



Upcoming events in 2025

For your diary!

January	March	April
30 January 2025 Bibliothekspolitischer Bundeskongress of the dbv in Berlin	21 March 2025 World Poetry Day	4 April 2025 Night of the Libraries (nationwide)
May	June	September
23 April 2025 World Book and Copyright Day	3 – 10 May 2025 Freedom of Expression Week (nationwide)	21 June 2025 Day of the Open Society (nationwide)
24 – 27 June 2025 Library Congress in Bremen	27 June 2025 'Bundesweiter Digitaltag' (nationwide)	15 September 2025 International Day of Democracy
October	November	
28 September 2025 International Day for the Universal Access to Information	24 October 2025 Day of the Libraries (nationwide)	21 November 2025 Federal Reading Aloud Day (nationwide)

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