

Summary



In the Palace of Contemplation, in the Temple of Knowledge / How the Homeless and the Poor Use Libraries (Sylvia Rizvi)

(pp. 614 – 617)

Public libraries provide services to all citizens. That is the goal and intention of the providers. But do these services work for people with little money? Or for those without a permanent address? Sylvia Rizvi of the Stuttgart street newspaper »Trott-war« went out and asked around. It was the first opportunity for those affected to speak out.

Library researchers have until now rarely shown interest in whether and how people with little money or no home use libraries and what services are provided for them. Library expert Karsten Schuldt suspects that this is due to difficulties in approaching this target group, which is also perceived as a problem group. Nonetheless there are quite a number programmes in Germany and particularly in other countries, such as the USA. For example, there are bookmobiles which make stops at homeless shelters, cooperative efforts between libraries and social service agencies and libraries which employ social workers.

Often there is a lack of lockers suitable for the homeless, when in fact they have a particular need to store their possessions safely during a library visit. A free-of-charge library card lowers the inhibitions to visit a library. House rules can be the source of a further potential deterrence. For one thing animals are usually forbidden, and certainly for understandable reasons, but for homeless dog owners this creates a nearly insurmountable barrier. One approach could be the increased use of street workers and more cooperation with organisations for the homeless.

Books for Boys Only! / How We Influence the Lending Patterns of Our Patrons (Milena Eberhard)

(pp. 629 – 631)

A study conducted in the City Library of Uster, Switzerland, posed the question of whether and how placing books into two categories, for »girls« or for »boys«, steered which books were borrowed by whom. The unambiguous results resulted in Uster abolishing this kind of allocation.

A categorisation of literature based on gender is problematic. Studies have already proven that such books often employ rigid gender stereotypes. Young readers gather a considerable amount of experience through books. The more diversity they encounter therein, the more varied and versatile their world view can become. A public institution should not reproduce antiquated role models. The results in Uster have shown that readers are influenced by publishers, bookstores and libraries categorising certain books as typically female or typical male. But it must be our goal to allow reading preferences to develop freely and to offer what our readers are interested in – independent of gender.

This is a clear call for action: the categories of »girls« and »boys« should be abolished in libraries. Yet this can only be the first step. In a second step, children's and young adult literature should be given a more critical look. Young readers can and should be irritated and challenged from time to time.

»With Tranquillity of the Soul, a Spirit of Scepticism and a Drive for Action« / Konrad Umlauf in an Interview about Libraries in Research and Teaching, the Relevance of Library Associations in the 21st Century and a Long List of Publications (Ute Engelkenmeier, Steffen Heizereder)

(pp. 632 – 638)

Konrad Umlauf appeared for an interview in the editorial offices of BuB in Reutlingen with mixed feelings. In a sense it is one of his old haunts, one of many. From 1992 to 1998 Umlauf was the national chairperson of Germany's Association of Librarians and Library Assistants (vba), which became part of the newly founded professional association, BIB, in 2000. From 1998 to 2008 he was a member of the editorial board of BuB. That this interview take place in person was important to Umlauf. Video conferences are often somewhat too functional and impersonal. For nearly an hour and a half he answered the questions of the current chairperson of the BIB, Ute Engelkenmeier, and BuB editor Steffen Heizereder.

It developed into a conversation about the significance of public libraries for research and teaching, the future of library associations and Umlauf's passion for publishing his writings. He also finds the coronavirus pandemic a cause for concern: »It would be a serious impoverishment if training courses and conferences could only take place digitally in the future. It makes a difference whether you are in the same room and able to perceive others in their entirety. Body language, clothing, winks of the eye—all these things are only barely, if at all, discernible on the screen.«

And what are Umlauf's hopes for librarianship in the future? »I would like to answer that with regard to the library profession. My wish for the colleagues in active service is that they can shape their own future with tranquillity of the soul, a spirit of scepticism and a drive for action,« said Umlauf at the close of our interview.

Translated by Martha Baker