

Summary



A Book is a Book / Or: The Long Path to Legal Regulations for E-Books in Libraries (Barbara Schleihagen)

(pp. 96 – 101)

Libraries guarantee the fundamental right of citizens to inform themselves through freely accessible sources. Hence, they contribute, even in the digital world, towards social participation and equal opportunity. As non-commercial partners for education, culture and science, libraries are considered a core public service. Currently, discussions revolve around which kind of service should count as a digital public service. For libraries this much is certain: they fulfil their public mission of enabling all individuals access to the knowledge of the world also by means of digital media, and have been offering these to borrowers for nearly 15 years.

Unlike the print media sector, where authors, publishers, bookstores, and libraries are part of an ecosystem in which they can co-exist and help advance one another, the authors and publishers of digital products feel themselves threatened by the digital offerings of libraries and fear that library lending will greatly affect the sales of e-books. Thus, they vehemently defend the current licencing practice in which they themselves can establish the earliest possible lending date and the respective terms. This is purportedly necessary to protect the book market. In this way, however, many newly published works in digital format are withheld from library users for a period of up to twelve months.

In Germany, books and e-books are already given equal protection under the retail price maintenance law. For ten years, the German Library Association (dbv) has advocated for the equal treatment of printed books and e-books. Libraries should be allowed to select e-books, using their own criteria, immediately upon publication, and to acquire the requisite lending licences.

Dare More Progress – Also for Libraries! / Library-related Promises from the New German Government and How They Can Be Implemented (Jacqueline Breidlid)

(pp. 110 – 114)

The governmental policy statement of Germany's new federal government which bears the motto »Dare More Progress« also contains a range of goals related to libraries: »Culture with Everyone«, fairer conditions for e-borrowing, Sunday opening hours and reinforcing libraries as third places, a more science-friendly copyright law. As easily accessible venues of cultural and social activities, as venues for education and as mediators of sustainability, libraries play an important role in ensuring an open and inclusive society and educational equity. For them to maximize their role, it is now necessary for the plans of the government in these areas to be implemented without delay.

The clear commitment of the new coalition government to establish fair conditions for e-book lending has been expressly welcomed by the Germany Library Association (dbv). Due to loopholes in the current laws, libraries can offer many e-books only with a waiting period of up to one year after publication. Hence, the basic library mission – ensuring access to basic information for all citizens – can thus be only partially realised within the world of digital information at this time.

The German Library Association takes the position that there is a need for a legal framework which allows libraries to select e-books from all those available on the market immediately upon publication and to acquire lending licences at reasonable terms. A statutory basis for realising this goal – i.e., access to newly published e-books – must now finally be passed as law.

Robot Is Listening! – Reading Aloud 4.0 / How Efforts of the City Library of Frankfurt am Main and the Technical University of Applied Sciences Wildau toward Motivating Children to Read Aloud Earned Them the German Reading Prize 2021 (Sabine Prasch)

(pp. 124 – 127)

Today digital media are an indisputable part of the public programmes of many libraries. The City Library of Frankfurt is one of those which has devoted itself increasingly to the possibilities of robotics, coding, and the like. The library has been especially successful in the blending of robot technology and reading promotion. Its program titled »Roboter hört mit! – Lautlesen 4.0« (»Robot Is Listening! – Reading Aloud 4.0«) was developed and implemented in close cooperation with the TH Wildau. In 2021 the project was selected for the German Reading Prize given by the German Reading Foundation (Stiftung Lesen).

In recent years the City Library of Frankfurt am Main has developed many new programs involving digitalisation, electronic media, and STEM topics. It all started with the establishment of its Department for Digital Services. The department's head, Elfriede Ludwig, has placed special emphasis on teaching digital literacy. She has been initiating new projects since 2019 in conjunction with experts from other organisations. These include both the TechnoTHEK, an in-library workshop centred around building sets and basic technical applications that was created with the support of the Association of German Engineers (VDI), and Arduino-based coding workshop events conducted in cooperation with the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences. The library's mission to promote technical education is enhanced by employing a »Dobot« to show the possibilities of a robotic arm for precision tasks in industrial settings, and a programmable humanoid Nao robot that the library has dubbed »Ada«.

Translated by Martha Baker