

Dr. Irmgard Siebert

Grußwort 10. Internationale Bielefeld Konferenz: Shaping Future Info-Structures

Dear Mr. Egelhaaf, dear Mr. Höppner, dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of section 4 of the German Library Association (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband) I would like to welcome you at the Bielefeld Conference 2012. The headline of this year's conference is: "Shaping the future of information infrastructures". A lot of interesting technology subjects come along with this, as Michael pointed out earlier before. But also, there is quite some strategy, and also some politics to talk about.

Last year quite a number of strategy papers about the status and the perspectives of information infrastructures have been published in Germany. The German Research Foundation¹ (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) wrote about the development of national library networks. And the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat) published four papers with a lot of substance about the future of information infrastructures.²

Both organizations emphasize the important role of university libraries as providers of information infrastructures. They are aware, that we own and preserve the relevant content. And we add value through services for efficient workflows in research and teaching – always being extremely close to our "customers". Consequently, the Science Council concluded, that "a broad and functional portfolio of information infrastructure institutions needs to be maintained and expanded".³

In the mean time, another group of representatives, mostly from non-university organizations was formed under the name "Commission on the Future of Information Infrastructures"⁴: "KII". Claiming to be a high-ranking board of experts⁵, these institutions wanted to be recognized and accepted as powerful key players. They also presented a concept for the development of information infrastructures last year, and in their own words, this was meant to be a national master plan.

As you can imagine, the papers of the German Research Foundation, as well as those from the Science Council, were welcomed by the university libraries. Whereas the publication of the "KII" was seen far more critical – or to say it frankly: There was quite an intense dispute in the section 4 about the key messages.

¹ Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft: Positionspapier zur Weiterentwicklung der Bibliotheksverbände als Teil einer überregionalen Informationsstruktur. Erarbeitet vom DFG-Ausschuss für wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken und Informationssysteme, Januar 2011, verabschiedet durch den Senat der DFG am 02.02.2011.

(http://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/foerderung/programme/lis/positionspapier_bibliotheksverbuende.pdf).

² For example: Wissenschaftsrat: Empfehlungen zur Zukunft des bibliothekarischen Verbundsystems in Deutschland (Drs. 10463-11), 28.01.2011 (<http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/10463-11.pdf>). – Wissenschaftsrat: Übergreifende Empfehlungen zur Informationsinfrastrukturen (Drs. 10466-11), 28.01.2011 (<http://wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/10466-11.pdf>).

³ Wissenschaftsrat: Übergreifende Empfehlungen, p. 7.

⁴ Kommission Zukunft der Informationsinfrastruktur: Gesamtkonzept für die Informationsinfrastruktur in Deutschland, April 2012

(http://www.allianzinitiative.de/fileadmin/user_upload/KII_Gesamtkonzept.pdf).

⁵ ibidem, p. 5.

Before I comment on this, I would like to briefly describe the current situation of the university libraries. Needless to say, our main task is to provide literature and information to our target groups in research and teaching. Nowadays this is a quite challenging job, because our clients want simply “everything”, and they want it “instantly”, as a prorektor summarized the situation recently in Düsseldorf, where I come from.

To manage this job properly, we need to have quite a clear view about our future objectives and requirements for optimized information services. And I can confirm: we do have this. Especially the university libraries in the state of Northrhine-Westfalia have described their future requirements for information supply and then published their position.⁶ To make a long story short – the message is: Excellent research by universities requires excellent local information infrastructures.

To be honest, we were quite surprised, that the “KII” concluded, that in total only certain eight organizations should form the German information infrastructure network – thereby defining the scope extremely narrow and without giving any explanations. Providing key competences and a lot of professional experience is one of the promises, you can hear from them. That’s just fine, but without successful reference projects and proven achievement this won’t work.

In other words: Can we really trust, that these players will provide faster, better and more cost-effective “central services”, compared to the service levels we have today? How can we get a proof of practicality and evidence? Service providers in information infrastructures sometimes promise a lot. Look at electronic long term preservation, for instance. But the business is to achieve results, not promises.

Furthermore it is quite irritating, that the “KII” wants to proceed their proposals almost immediately⁷, although it is well known, that prior to this the Science Council is asked to submit their observations.⁸ Is the intention to supply “facts”? Even without participation of the scientific community, which needs to analyze, evaluate and discuss their critical needs?

Research in Germany still is very much focusing on universities, and university libraries have the competitive advantage in providing literature and information locally – in high quality, quickly, and cost-effectively. This observation is fully acknowledged by the German Research Foundation and by the Science Council.

Now, what’s the link of all these politics to Bielefeld Conference?

Well, the university library of Bielefeld is a major player in developing information infrastructures during the past 40 years. Innovation has a long tradition here. Since 20 years there is a Bielefeld Conference, a very modern, in part avant-garde meeting opportunity for experts and pioneers, aiming to keep scientific libraries up to date with regard to permanent innovation. In other words: An important communication forum for information specialists and innovators.

⁶ Dietmar Haubfleisch, unter Mitwirkung von Ulrike Eich, Michael Höppner, Peter Otzen, Irmgard Siebert und Renate Vogt: Zentrale Dienstleistungen für die Universitätsbibliotheken in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Positionen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Universitätsbibliotheken des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. Paderborn 2011 (<http://ubdok.uni-paderborn.de/servlets/DocumentServlet?id=12771>). – Also in: Bibliotheksdienst. Jg. 45 (2011), H. 5, S. 428-441. (http://www.zlb.de/aktivitaeten/bd_neu/heftinhalte2011/Bibliotheken010511_BD.pdf).

⁷ Kommission Zukunft der Informationsinfrastruktur: Gesamtkonzept, p. 68.

⁸ Wissenschaftsrat: Übergreifende Empfehlungen, p. 4.

The section 4 of the German Library Association is proud to have the university library of Bielefeld as a powerful and strong organization among its members. I would like to thank the team of the university library of Bielefeld for their strong commitment and their high motivation when organizing this year's Bielefeld Conference. For the next three days, I would like to wish you a lot of inspiration, interesting discussions and many, many new insights for your work.

Thank you.