BII Report: Study Tour to Germany, March 2010

Flippie van der Walt, South Africa

Introduction

This report highlights the study tour I have undertaken to Germany in March 2010. The tour consisted of attending the BID Conference in Leipzig and visiting the Koln and Bremen City Libraries. Since my first study tour in 2005 to Wurzburg City Library, I have developed an interest in the Germany Public Libraries, and since also have become a member of BIB.

BID Conference

The 2010 annual BID Conference took place in Leipzig in the Leipzig Messe. Being used to the South African approach to library conferences, I found the week extremely interesting and was very impressed to see the commitment of the delegates in attending sessions and to network. I also had the opportunity to meet up with old library friends and to network with new ones.

Hannelore, Flippie and Ute

I met interesting people from all over Germany, Netherland and Britain. The displays were also a unique experience for me to discover new and interesting products, services and to network. I must complement BID for the special invitation they extended to the Spanish Library Association - it was a bonus for me not to wear the T-shirt worn by LIS Students.
Only to experience German libraries but also have a glance at the Spanish libraries, the challenges they experience but also the successes they have in their country. I surely left the conference with new ideas, insights and library friends.

The Leipzig Book Fair was another highlight of the conference. I think it was a great idea to host the conference parallel with the book fair, keeping the profession in touch with the book world.

Leipzig is an exciting city. I enjoyed the historical part of the city, the snow and my personal favorite the Johannes Sebastian Bach statue and Church.

Köln City Library

My next stop on the study tour was Köln City Library. I have met Dr Vogt in South Africa at a LIASA conference, and the friendship grew when I visited Würzburg City Library in 2005. Since then Dr Vogt took over management at Köln City Library and it was an imminent decision to visit Köln.

With limited time and a list as long as my arm the staff at Köln City Library catered for all
my professional needs. The library is a modern building with distinctive features.

The children’s section and children’s programmes at Köln City Library is quite exciting and can easily be adopted into a South African perspective. The Mini Bib in the park and how it is operated is also a unique approach to public library services and I want to salute the Könl City Library team for the initiative and awareness it creates for reading and books. Please visit www.stadt-koeln.de to learn more about the exciting features of the Mini Bib and the services provided by the Köln City Library.

Bremen City Library

My third and last stop of the study tour was at the Bremen City Library. I met Mrs. Barbara Lison also in South Africa at a LIASA conference, and I immediately had a desire to visit Bremen City Library. This library is any public librarian’s dream – from the historical exterior to the modern and vibrant interior.

The ICON of the City Bremen and the City Library

The library caters in any possible need that an information seeker or reader can have. The children’s library is a heaven for any child, decorated with themes and plenty of space that can feed the imagination of any child, not to speak of the mascot, Kessie the Crow that creates the ultimate library experience. The open space in the library is magnificent and I must compliment the staff for using it to the fullest extend and for creating a public library with a difference. The staff at the library also catered for all my professional needs and I actually have a marathon program to ensure I meet up with all specialist and managers.

Please visit www.stadtbibliothek-bremen.de to learn more about Kessie the Crow and the exciting services provided by Bremen City Library.
Value of the tour

The value of the tour is not just captured in memories or photographs, no it is in the new friends I made, the old ones that I renewed and the networking I made from the BiD conference throughout to Köln and Bremen. The ultimate value of the tour was the ideas I got from visiting Köln and Bremen which I will use to improving on my management style and the approaches I make in my own position in the City of Cape Town. I also gained brilliant ideas on improving public library services and especially children’s services. One important aspect that is worth mentioning is the discussions I had around staff complement, structures, budgets, collection development and employment conditions in Germany, with special reference to Köln and Bremen. I found the discussions on these topics very interesting and also shared the South African and City of Cape Town approaches with the German colleagues.

Conclusion

I find that a study tour is an ideal way to broaden the professional perspective of a person. The value of such a tour is of great significance in expanding knowledge, networking and comparing the two spheres. An added value is reflecting on the individual’s career. The study tour was of great value for me, especially in my current position as a manager of public libraries.
I also want to extend my appreciation and sincere thank towards the contributors who made my 2010 study tour not just a memorable one but a fruitful one. Thank you to **Bi International** ([http://www.bi-international.de](http://www.bi-international.de)) for awarding me a grant to attend the BiD conference and to visit Köln and Bremen. An extended thank you to Dr. H Vogt and the staff from Köln City Library and Mrs. Barbara Lison and the staff from Bremen City Library in opening their doors for me, making time to meet all my needs and to host me.

Flippie van der Walt

South Africa

Flippie.vanderwalt@capetown.gov.za