



## World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

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**Code Number:** 200-E  
**Meeting:** 159. Library Service to Multicultural Populations - **Workshop**  
**Simultaneous Interpretation:** -

### **Library service for and in cooperation with persons of foreign origin**

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After World War II the area of Berlin called Kreuzberg was partly destroyed by allied bombs, where half of all houses were in ruins. Cheap housing attracted students, refugees and social out-casts, as well as an increasing number of foreign workers. In June of 1961 93 Turkish "guest-workers" arrived in West-Germany. By the end of the year 7.000 Turks worked in the country, and by 1974 28.000 Turkish people lived in Kreuzberg.

Also in 1974 the only Turkish library in Berlin was established. The Namik-Kemal-Library (named after a famous Turkish author) offered library materials for adults and children, and was headed by a Turkish librarian.

In 1973 the import of "guest-workers" was stopped. From 1978 onwards the terminology changed – officially the term "immigrants" instead of "guest-workers" was introduced. The number of persons of Turkish origin in Kreuzberg continued to increase, partly due to family members moving to Germany from Turkey and partly caused by the arrival of ca. 60.000 Turkish asylum seekers after the military intervention in Turkey in 1980. After 1983, when a repatriation programme was introduced more than 100.000 persons returned to Turkey. At the time Germany experienced more and more animosity towards foreigners, though not in Kreuzberg. There is surprisingly little friction between the many different ethnic groups, who come from quite different cultural traditions.

At present Kreuzberg has 146.000 inhabitants, 50.500 are not German citizens. It is difficult to determine exactly how many of the inhabitants have a German passport but are of non-German origins. 27.000 come from Turkey, 5.800 from EU-countries, 17.700 from former Yugoslavia, Africa and Arabic countries.

#### **The "Kotti"<sup>1</sup> area**

The Namik-Kemal-Library is placed in the most Turkish-dominated area of Berlin; more than 50% are non-Germans. It has a concentration of potential social problems; large families, many on the dole or on welfare, many muslims, only few recreational areas, congested traffic,

many homeless persons, street children, drug addicts etc. An injection room for IV drug addicts will open shortly. Most local businesses are owned by Turks, and there are also Turkish and Arabic lawyers and doctors, but most of the well-educated and well-integrated young people have moved to other parts of the city.

### **The Kotti Library**

The library was built in the 1960s and has never been renovated. More men than women use the library. In later years it has developed into a daily meeting place for a new group of users: the foreign senior citizens. They find an attraction in the many Turkish and Arabic newspapers and periodicals.

Also the young Turks and Arabs are frequent library users. They often come in large, noisy groups in order to do their home-work, but also because the library is one of the few places where young people of both sexes can meet. The children's library offers help with home-work for school on a regular basis, and in the adult library the librarian must often also function as an assistant teacher.

### **Library materials**

During the 1970s the emphasis was on providing books and periodicals in Turkish, and later cassette tapes and videos were added. The library bought almost whatever was available - the acquisition of materials is much more complicated at present, because the library users, whether Turks or Germans, have much higher and more specific expectations.

The Turkish senior citizens are still so closely connected to their land of origin that they will read even not very attractive books published in Turkey. In contrast, the young Turks judge the content of the books – the language doesn't count. However, language training materials (German as a foreign language t. ex.) is in great demand. Lack of sufficient funding makes it difficult for the library to meet the demand for books on literature and culture in the countries of origin: Islam, Turkish and Arabic history, architecture, art and music.

### **Multi-cultural materials**

“Multi-culture” is a separate collection of materials in German, aimed at increasing mutual understanding and co-existence among different ethnic groups, Germans and immigrants. The library purchases almost all materials on multi-cultural child-rearing, the situation of foreign women and girls, the particular problems of young adult immigrants, opposition to foreigners etc.

The Turkish materials from Namil-Kemal Library consists of 4.500 books, 580 videos, 400 cassette tapes and 80 video CDs. For a number of years the use of these materials declined, but lately there has been an increase in demand. In contrast, the use of Turkish children's books has dropped and the collection has consequently been reduced.

It poses no problems to purchase Turkish videos and music in local shops, whereas it is much more difficult to find books in Turkish. The library now buys books directly from a bookseller in Istanbul, assisted by the retired former head of Namil-Kemal Library, a Turkish librarian. Unfortunately this adds to the cost of the books, and it is very inconvenient that the library frequently has to collect the books from the customs office!

Turkish videos as well as Music CDs are in great demand especially by young people. The library also has a large collection of music from the rest of the world, on CD.

### **Literacy assistance for children**

Kreuzberg is an area with many young persons. Approximately 18% are under the age of 15, and more than 50% of the school children are non-German; of the pupils in 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade

more than 60% are non-German. However, 30% of the young adults drop out of school before graduating from the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and more than 50% of the drop-outs are of foreign origin. It is a constant struggle for committed teachers to teach reading, writing and arithmetic to the many pupils, who often start school without knowing one word of German. Unfortunately, it seems that both language skills and reading ability are getting worse as the years pass. The librarians at the children's library in Kreuzberg consistently assist younger children in language training and reading skills. The library offers help with home-work assignments, arranges story-reading sessions, and training courses in the use of PC and Internet. In fact, apart from the school the library is the most influential place of learning in the community. In co-operation with one of the schools lower grades from the school visit the library during school-hours at regular intervals. The children then have the opportunity to use all the library's materials while working on a project, which the teacher and librarian have prepared together.

### **Reading aloud to the youngest**

This is an attempt to encourage non-German parents to visit the library and to read aloud to their children.

### **Reading is great**

During 6 months 20 primary school children voluntarily came to the library each week to improve their reading skills, aided by 4 university student from "Free University".

### **Pre-school children**

The Library also has plans for language support for kindergarden children. Although attending kindergarden should help children learn German, many employees of foreign origin are unable to teach the young children grammatically correct German.

### **The Kotti children**

The children in Wilhelm Liebknecht/Namik-Kemal Library come from families with no tradition of formal education. Many of the children are left unsupervised during after-school hours. They are noisy, insolent, lack concentration and dislike school. On the other hand, they are remarkably charming and bright. The library is often regarded as an extra home by those children. They visit the library almost daily in large groups, and stay for several hours – with a total disregard for all and any library rule. But they come of their own free will, often and with pleasure. It is the obligation of the librarian to make them understand the joy and importance of reading. 28 of such children spent the winter break (one week, 2002) discovering what the library had to offer.

### **The Kottis' search for the secret of the Orient**

Children of Turkish and Arabic heritage + 3 German children participated in a theatre performance at the library, under the direction of professional artists. The children worked with great enthusiasm in 4 workshops: acting, dancing, performance and costumes. The dress rehearsal was a disaster, but opening night was an almost total success. The children all experienced the joy of achievement, and the library made new contacts in the community.

### **A worthwhile challenge**

Libraries are important in the integration of immigrants into main-stream society. The Libraries have to work together with users of foreign origin instead of providing services for foreigners. This requires a change of attitude in all library workers. They have to focus more

on the actual situation of the users and less on the library materials. One of the most important aspects is finding new partners in the important task of training language and reading: employees at kindergartens, schools, folk high schools, youth programmes, Universities etc.

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<sup>1</sup> "Kotti" is a popular abbreviation for the official name of the place: "Kottbusser Tor"