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**The German National Library and the COVID-19 pandemic**

With increasing numbers of coronavirus infections in Germany also the German National Library (DNB) closed its reading rooms and exhibitions on March 16, 2020. Only a few days later, all operations of the German National Library were temporarily shut down. The closure of the library was hard for our patrons, and it was difficult for our staff. Most of the staff members were sent home, and those remaining onsite had to organise a lot. They had to expand existing solutions enabling our colleagues to work effectively from home. All business trips were cancelled, meetings and conferences were adjourned. Videoconferencing that had been used before was expanded as it was the only opportunity for most of our staff members to meet and keep in touch. A crisis response team was established which met daily via a videoconferencing system and informed all staff members immediately after the meetings by e-mail and on a protected part of our website. Over time, the frequency of the crisis response team meetings has been reduced.

Communication with our patrons has been provided continuously by e-mail or telephone. Gradually, also DNB’s digital services were enhanced so that documents could be delivered in urgent cases. Usually, the German National Library offers access to all of its holdings on site in Leipzig and Frankfurt am Main. As a relatively young national library existing just one hundred and seven years, with legal deposit starting from 1913, large parts of our collection of about 40 million items are copyright restricted. This means that only a comparatively small part of about 1.3 million online publications or digitized material is accessible without restrictions from outside the library’s reading rooms. To stay in contact with our patrons, we also intensified our social media activities and promoted the use of our open access online publications and our virtual exhibitions.

Due to the fact that a large number of cultural events scheduled to take place at our locations had to be called off, we had to send cancellations to many partners involved – including authors, actors, film producers, musicians and publishers. In order to support them the DNB commissioned e.g. 15 actors and a small team of film makers to produce some video clips. The film series “Reading Europe” draws attention to the diversity of DNB’s collections. In the second half of 2020, we organised three virtual conferences to commemorate Germany’s presidency of the Council of the EU: “Rethinking Culture and Science - Opportunities, Risks and Developments of the Digital Revolution in Europe” on 7 October 2020, “Beethoven 2020/2030: Music in the Digital Present and Future” on 22 October 2020, and “Translating Europe – Translation in Times of Digital Revolution” on 4 November 2020. These three conferences were funded by the Minister of State for Culture and the Media. The Reading Europe video clips and the conference recordings are available at: <https://www.dnb.de/EN/europe>.

In late April 2020, the authorities of the German federal states of Saxony and Hesse where the two sites of the DNB are located, allowed library operations to be resumed. In compliance with the applicable hygiene and social distancing rules, we have made available a limited number of reading room workplaces at each of DNB‘s locations. Using our reservation system, patrons can book a slot on a daily basis one week in advance of the required day. For the main reading rooms, DNB is offering multiple time-periods. In between the time slots, the reading rooms are cleaned. In the reading rooms all workplaces have been blocked that have not the mandatory distance of 1.50 meters from each other. This left around 100 workstations at each of the library sites which could be released for use. The re-opening of the library took place on May 4. Although the reading places available are still booked out very quickly, the patrons have been highly pleased with the re-opening of our reading rooms. We are now also implementing tools offering new ways to communicate with our patrons, for user introductions, training courses etc. in the form of video chats, webinars or web conferences.

Luckily, the German National Library has been allowed to stay open even when a second shutdown was announced for Germany in the first days of November. With our pre-reservation system and the hygiene and distance rules in place, we have been able to continue our work. Unfortunately, all our exhibitions had to close, and we had to cancel all physical events until January 2021. And as the numbers of infections are still not declining, it is not clear when the restrictions will be eased.

So far, we have been successfully extending the possibilities for large parts of our staff members to work from home. This helps those working on site to keep the required minimum distance. In the meantime, we have reached a kind of “new normality”, and we strive to keep some of the forms of “new work” established during the crisis. As the positive aspect of the situation is the fact that many of our colleagues feeling reservations towards digitization before, see the advantages of working remotely, now. Thus, we hope that the crisis at least will advance the digitization in Germany and in German libraries and other cultural institutions.

The German National Library is Germany's central archival library. The library collects, documents and archives all publications and sound recordings issued in Germany since 1913 together with works that were compiled in the German language or relate to Germany. The collection is supplemented by the holdings in the German Music Archive, the German Museum of Books and Writing and the German Exile Archive 1933–1945.