

Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
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German National Library

Annual Report 2021

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Shaping the future

The German National Library had to start 2021 with another lockdown. The reading rooms had to stay closed until 15 March. Given the fact that only about 1.9 million of DNB's more than 43.7 million media units can be accessed online from outside the library sites, that's pretty much the most painful thing that can happen for the DNB. To access the vast majority of the media – both analogue and digital – people have to come to the reading rooms in Leipzig or Frankfurt am Main. Besides the fact that we are all noticing more “pandemic fatigue”, on the whole DNB got through the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic very well.

While the DNB had to lockdown for visitors, also most of the staff had to work from home with very limited opportunities to meet in real life. It's interesting to see that even when they can do their work perfectly well from home, staff are looking forward to being able to come back to the library at least a few days a week. At the same time, the DNB is learning to deal with the situation better; for one thing, meeting places were created in virtual space where people can exchange thoughts and ideas. With regard to the DNB's distributed locations in Leipzig and Frankfurt, the situation was actually favourably. Before the pandemic, there was a certain aloofness between the two locations, which is quite understandable considering their history and the geographical distance between them. But that has ceased to be an issue since staff started meeting in a shared virtual space. Colleagues from both locations had video conferences before the COVID-19 pandemic, but they felt different. In this respect, the pandemic has boosted a “new normal” between the sites.

Despite the ongoing pandemic the German National Library was able to create several highlights in 2021, among them cultural activities and several internal events. In August the prospect paper “Kulturen im digitalen Wandel” (“Digital transformation in the cultural sector”) was successfully presented to the public. The DNB considers this topic very important as a strategy is vital in shaping change in a cooperative manner. And for developing a strategy it is helpful to draw a

shared picture of the future, one which not only includes its challenges but also shows the opportunities which digitisation offers to the public cultural sector. The paper does exactly that and should be seen as a working paper that was developed in consensus with all stakeholders. The DNB was asked by the Minister of State for Culture and the Media to coordinate and moderate this discussion process and has been very happy to do so. It is the start of a long-term strategy process, the implementation of which has of course already begun. The DNB is for example strongly committed to the engagement der Allianz zur Kulturgutdigitalisierung (Alliance for the Digitisation of Cultural Heritage).

Regarding digitisation, standardisation of entities and metadata is immensely important in this area, and the Integrated Authority File (GND) plays a pivotal role in this respect. With the project “GND for Cultural Data” (GND4C) – which entered the second phase in 2021 – the DNB aims to enable other cultural institutions to use the GND. And within the framework of the National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI), the DNB is going one step further and seeks points of contact with science. In 2021 the DNB became involved with the Text+ consortium. This was a big external funding success.

Another success of 2021 was the crossing of a symbolic threshold concerning the DNB’s collection of online publications. The collection contains now more than 10 million items, and it continues to grow rapidly. Online publications currently make up a quarter of the entire collection; over the next five or six years, the proportion of digital publications will grow to one third. This is a very impressive testimony to the efforts the DNB has made to collect and digitise these works; after all, this is an integral part of the library’s strategy. To manage the growth of the collection of digital publications the DNB has been using machine-based cataloguing processes for more than ten years, despite considerable resistance – especially in the beginning. Since then, the DNB has been constantly improving the processes and tools – like EMA the “indexing machine”, for example – and will definitely be making greater use of artificial intelligence in the future. In 2021, a new research project in this area was launched; the DNB also exchanged thoughts and ideas with other partners during the “Network for machine-based cataloguing” conference.

For endeavours like digitisation or artificial intelligence the German National Library needs qualified staff and experts. Recruiting them is a whole field of action in the DNB’s “Strategic Priorities”, i.e. “Developing the learning organisation”. But this is not only about experts, but also about a generational change the library is facing. The DNB has to make every effort to stay attractive as an employer and make people outside the institution feel its appeal. Consequently, the DNB started an employer branding project in 2021 to clarify how the library actually perceives and understands itself, or in other words, to define its culture, position and self-image. With this in mind, the DNB hopes to present and promote itself with a clear message and vision. One result of the employer branding project was a sentence that expresses the DNB’s self-understanding: **“An unexpectedly wide variety of opportunities to contribute to something meaningful and lasting – linking cultural heritage with the digital future.”** An overwhelming majority of staff actually sees a deeper meaning in what they do. They realize they shape the future together and do not only preserve Germany’s cultural heritage but also provide access to it as an active cultural memory. The DNB’s attitude towards this is “meaningful endeavour”.

Collect & Preserve

In 2021, the German National Library added almost 2.3 million new media items to its collections. Its total holdings have thus grown to 43.66 million, almost a quarter of which are online publications. As of December 2021, 10.4 million online publications and digitised printed works with a volume of approximately 190 TB were stored in the permanent archive. The German Exile Archive 1933–1945 was able to add a number of rare items to its collection, including seven estates and

archives, 17 individual autographs, and a wide variety of exile publications. The German Museum of Books and Writing acquired a one-of-a-kind collection consisting of more than 4,300 kinetic books. It also became the owner of a unique collection of American underground and independent comics. In 2021, almost 10,000 archival copies of websites on selected subjects, institutions and events were stored in the German National Library's web archive. As part of its preservation activities, the DNB reviewed the sustainability of the mass deacidification carried out in recent years. Preliminary results have shown that the deacidified volumes dating from 1994 and after are mostly stable. Business processes in the Preservation section have been restructured so that large quantities of works can be monitored at both locations while digitisation measures are under way.

Document & Disseminate

During the year under review, almost 159,000 books, journals, maps, musical scores, audio recordings and other physical media works were catalogued descriptively and by subject and assigned to DDC Subject Categories. Almost 700,000 online publications were assigned to appropriate subject categories using machine-based processes; around 150,000 of these were also assigned machine-generated subject headings and 575,000 given DDC Short Numbers. In 2021, the DNB began transferring data through the Culturegraph platform, which brings together metadata from the German and Austrian library networks and the German National Library. It has thus enriched some 1.2 million of its bibliographic data records with more than 1.4 million authority data links for persons. The project GNDmul was initiated in order to continue the development of concordances between the Integrated Authority File (GND) and other thesauri. "Metadata for all": Following the establishment of a new metadata service in April 2021, many of the DNB's services that previously required users to register or pay a fee can now be used free of charge and are accessible to all. The new service for continually updated datasets and the elimination of registration procedures for existing services have made all of the German National Library's metadata more accessible while further increasing the reach of this high-quality data.

Present & Inspire

As part of the work on further developing the German National Library's catalogue, the second – as yet internal – prototype has now been completed. A number of new functions and information areas have been added to the website. Work began on digitising monographs from shelf kilometre zero in order to place a digital layer over the entire collection. All books acquired in Leipzig in or after 1913 and in Frankfurt am Main in or after 1945 are to be digitised successively. By the end of the year, the DNB's collection of digitised works consisted of around 200,000 media comprising some 12.9 million pages and 45,200 audio works. The licensing service for out-of-commerce works (VW-Lis) suspended operations in June 2021 when the amendment to the Act on the Management of Copyright and Related Rights by Collecting Societies came into force. Due to the pandemic-related interruptions to user operations that persisted until 14 March, the DNB was unable to admit users to its premises on 60 potential opening days. On 15 March 2021, limited user operations resumed at both locations. The results of a quantitative user survey showed that users were generally very satisfied. Work continued on the modernisation measures designed to improve the quality of user stays on the DNB's premises. The DNB has been offering virtual introductions for new users and online research training for experienced ones since March 2021. In the area of provenance research, work began on the systematic review of monographs acquired between 1933 and 1945.

Integrate & Organise

A strategic opening process has been initiated in order to enable organisations outside the library sector to take part in the committees responsible for standardisation work in the German-speaking countries. 2021 accordingly saw new members from the archiving and monumental preservation sectors join the standardisation committee. Efforts are also being made to open the Integrated Authority File (GND) to museums, archives, building heritage authorities and scientific institutions. The project “GND4C – GND for Cultural Data” is putting the necessary technical and organisational conditions in place. The second phase of the project got under way in mid-2021. The DNB’s cooperation with open community projects included the implementation of projects such as “GND meets Wikibase” and ORCID DE. The Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (German Digital Library – DDB) rolled out two new sub-portals: the German Newspaper Portal and the portal “Collections from Colonial Contexts”. With regard to the Uniform Resource Name service, 2021 saw around 3.2 million URNs in the namespace urn:nbn:de assigned by the German National Library and its partner institutions, which now number 420. The DNB’s international networking activities included the conclusion of a cooperative agreement with Library and Archives Canada. The members of the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) elected Director General Frank Scholze as their new chairman.

Encourage & Enable

The central staff recruitment department in Leipzig has introduced an electronic application management system. The first ever training programme was developed in response to a digital survey of the qualification requirements of all DNB staff; this lasted for six calendar months and was extensively used. The Central Domain Administration reached a milestone with the introduction of an electronic file-keeping system (E-Akte-Bund), with which standard internal administrative procedures can be handled digitally and transferred to an archive. In 2021, the German National Library managed a budget of approximately EUR 58.3 million along with approximately EUR 2.1 million EUR. Property accessibility was assessed at both locations and the fire alarm technology updated. Metadata import and process control using the workflow engine Camunda were tested as the next step in the complete replacement of the current infrastructure for the collection of digital objects. 2021 again saw a large number of cultural activities held online, now using additional formats such as film. The new DNB blog went live just in time for the Frankfurt Book Fair in October. Because of the pandemic, both the management conference with the motto “Shaping. Memory. Together” and the staff gathering took place virtually – and the feedback was again very positive.

Some figures

- | 651,3 full time equivalents (of which 40,5 are limited in time)
- | total budget: 57,624,000 Euro
- | total holdings: 43,659,525 items
- | new acquisitions in 2021: 2,291,117 items
- | users per day: 467
- | orders per day: 737

The complete annual report for 2021 can be found at: <https://d-nb.info/1257467816/34> (in German only, with English summaries).