

BERLIN - ESPOO - BERLIN

Learning without limits / Learning beyond country borders

by Jana Hörstermann and Stefanie Mohr

The name “Leonardo da Vinci” not only represents the Italian universal genius of the 15th century but also an educational programme of the European Union, which gives young people the opportunity to take another step in developing their personal and professional skills and knowledge by working abroad.

Jana Hörstermann and me came to Finland in the summer of 2008 to see and experience the way of working of our colleagues there.

We were heartily welcomed by all but soon we got our first surprise. All the working rooms were empty, so we had to ask ourselves, whether the personnel situation could be even worse than in the Berlin public libraries. Unbelievable!

Later, someone told us that during the summer usually only as few people as needed are working in the libraries and that this is a normal situation. Nevertheless it was a major experience for us and hardly comparable to Germany.

It was immediately to be seen that Finnish people are really talented in languages and we were very impressed to see how easy and flexible they can handle different languages in different situations.

The fact that the whole library system is in English was another great possibility for us to profit from this exchange even more. Since that is why we were all to work on our own in the different departments and to improve our language skills. In German libraries you cannot imagine working with a library system in English only.

During the training we noticed many parallels, but also some differences in the organization of work in both countries.

Even in their daily life the Finnish people seem to be more open for technical progresses than the Germans. This is even reflected by the user behaviour: The common use of self-operation lendings / loans and RFID is in Berlin (in public as well as scientific libraries) not even in a pre-state of what we experienced here during the first weeks. In addition, we were very surprised to see that it is not seldom to pay an overdue-loan charge of 40 cents by credit card. But not only the cash-free paying at the circulation desk showed us big differences; we also found out that they are not as strict concerning mobile phones than we are in German libraries. That was not the first time we felt that the Finns do not see things as rigorous as the Germans.

We will always remember the colleagues, who make the library of the Helsinki University of Technology (TKK) such a special place of education and learning, especially by their future oriented way of working, which develops and supports students information and media competence.

The possibility to get a glance into different ways of working is always of great importance and we will share our experiences made in the TKK with our colleagues in Germany. This exchange helped us to develop a better understanding for the librarian work in foreign countries.

In the end we would like to thank everybody who has helped us, we really appreciate that you gave us an insight into your way of working. These insights and the great communication made this exchange a precious life experience for us.

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