

A Survey Of The Mobile Libraries In Germany With A Special Look On The Munich Bookmobile System

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I. German Bookmobile History

The general history of mobile libraries dates back to the very beginning of the 20th century. In 1905 a young librarian called Mary Titcomb from Hagerstown, Maryland, USA, had the idea to provide those people with books who lived in rural areas or farms. She got a wagon which was drawn by two horses and carried around about 300 books. She called it „book wagon“ and went from farm to farm for a couple of years. In 1910 this wagon was destroyed while crossing a railroad track. It was hit by a freight train leaving only fragments of the wagon.

The first motorized vehicles for libraries were being used in 1913 in the USA and 1919 in Great Britain.

In Germany the first book mobile started back in 1925 in the city of Worms. It was a Ford Model-T which had room for 600 books and it drove to 52 villages around Worms. On board were a library assistant and a driver. After 3 years this service had to be withdrawn because of financial problems.

In 1927 the state of Saarland organized a box-type van to deliver books to 15 villages along the border area of France and Germany. This van held space for 1800 books and there was even a depot of another 5000 books especially for this mobile library. The van drove to the schoolhouses of these villages where the librarian gave advice to the readers regarding their choice of books and then went into the car to get the desired books. A second van was acquired in 1930, but when the Nazi-regime of Adolf Hitler ruled the country this successful project was liquidated in 1934.

And now it is time to mention my hometown Munich, because the third-ever mobile library in Germany started here in 1928. And it was a very special one: it was a tram! It was bought from the

municipal transport services and then rebuilt. There were 3000 books on board and the tram drove on rails to 8 stations within the city.

The people had to go into the tram to a counter where a librarian offered a consulting service and then fetched the books from the shelves and gave them to the readers. Unbelievable, but true: this very same tram was in use for 42 years, from February 1928 to April 1970! Even during World War II the tram ran continuously, only pausing during the last year of war. But already in October 1945 it started again, being the first operating mobile library in Germany after the Second World War. The Munich book tram was also the first mobile library that worked in a city, while all the others drove around villages and rural areas.

In the year 1929 the city of Dresden actually put a library bus into service. It was 9m long, 2m wide, had room for 3000 books and it already had electrical heating! All 13 stopping points had electrical connections, so the bus could be heated in the winter. Readers had to pay a service charge of 2 Marks per year (which is 1 Euro), but could only borrow 1 book at a time. The bus ran for ten years and then it was confiscated by the nazis and it was destroyed in the war like so many other mobile libraries.

So after the Second World War a new start had to be made and it were the Americans that really helped us here. In the early 50's they financed book mobiles with English and German literature to encourage democratisation.

In 1958 a German truck company invented a semitrailer which was very suitable for a bookmobile. This led to a real boom for mobile libraries and in 1980 we had 128 bookmobiles running in Germany.

After the reunification with the German Democratic Republic in 1989 the federal government financed 30 new buses for the new

German states. So in 1993 we reached the highpoint in the development of mobile libraries with **189 buses** running.

Since then more and more cities have had to make budget cuts and decided to stop the service of book mobiles.

Now let's take a look at the current state of affairs concerning mobile libraries in Germany. All the data comes from a **survey conducted in 2008** among all mobile libraries in my country:

At the moment there are still **97 cities, communities and counties** having book mobiles, with a total sum of **112 cars**.

80% of these are library buses, the rest being vans and trucks. These cars differ widely in size and capacity, so we have a range of **2500 to 6500 media units on board**.

In the last 8 years at least **25 new book mobiles** were bought here in Germany as replacement for older buses. In the upcoming years the purchase of another 20 new buses is already planned, although the financing isn't fixed yet. So you can't really say we are members of a dying breed.

You all know how expensive library buses are: the last 5 buses that were bought from cities in Germany costed between **400.000 € to 480.000 €!** These buses all had the same measurements, being around 12m long and 2,50 m wide, but they were made by various manufacturers and differed in the interior design.

So it's no wonder that all the cities cling to their book mobiles as long as possible, before spending half a million euros for a new one.

Right now 30 buses are more than 20 years old, the absolute leader being the library bus of Darmstadt with an incredible age of 34 years!

So who are the **providers of the mobile library service**:

Cities / Communities	56%
Counties	22%
Associations	10%
Mixed forms	12%

Now who **drives** the book mobiles:

own driver	75%
member of library staff drives	20%
external driver	5%

The **main user group** of the mobile libraries are still children and young people under 18.

52% of the mobile libraries said that the percentage of users who are under 18 years old is 61% or more.

88% of the mobile libraries have direct stops at schools.

Naturally, all these facts and figures have an influence on the ways and methods of work of our book mobiles. This leads us directly to the second topic of my lecture:

II. Methods Of Work In Mobile Libraries

Let's take a look at the **charging systems** of Germany's book mobiles:

In 2008: 72% have an **online computer charging system** (42% with UMTS-system, 30% with GPRS-system)

In 2006: only 35% had online computer charging.

So you can see there has been a tremendous development within the course of only two years!

Most of the buses which still work with card charging systems at least have laptops in the bus for searching in the library online catalogue.

Less than 10% of the book mobiles haven't got any computer!

Annual membership fees:

These are very diverse in Germany. Only 5% of the mobile libraries charge nothing. 80% are free of membership fees at least for children and young people up to 18 years. The others charge children 10 €, which is quite a lot, in my opinion.

Adults have to pay between 10€ and 45€ for an annual membership.

25% charge an extra fee for special media types like CDs or DVDs.

Staff:

68% have a librarian on board.

48% have library assistants and 43% also have library staff.

Stock on loan:

Nowadays the mobile libraries offer the same media as any public libraries: books, comics, magazines, games, CDs, DVDs, videos, cassettes and CD-ROMs.

Main operating areas:

are the suburbs and outskirts of cities, rural areas and schools.

I guess this is the same in your country right?

Now what kind of **services** do our mobile libraries **offer to schools** and kindergartens?

Direct stops at schools/kindergartens:	88%
Guided tours for classes:	92%
A set number of the same book per class	41%
Media boxes	40%
Readings by authors	31%
Specialized books for teachers / educators	20%

III. The National Mobile Library Organisation

First let me tell you that this headline is a swindle: in Germany we don't have a national mobile library organisation! This is due to the fact that the German librarianship in general is very decentralised.

The responsibility for all cultural things, for arts and science and the educational system is in the hands of each of our 16 states here in Germany. There isn't such a thing as a national library law, that already exists in 70% of the countries in the European Union. The establishment and financing of public libraries, museums or theatres is still a voluntary task of the cities and communities in our country!

Mobile libraries are working at the very basis of literature supply, they don't have any transregional or even national tasks. Therefore it is difficult for them to get appreciation in any national librarian organisations.

From 1978 to 1999 we had the German Library Institute in Berlin, which was financed by the federal government and the states. After the German reunification an expert commission for mobile libraries was established, which organized professional training, mainly for librarians from the newly formed German states. But there was never an event like this, a national congress of all the mobile libraries in the country.

When that institute folded, due to lack of financial backing, it took 4 years to establish the „competence network for libraries“ within the German Library Association. This network, which also works in a very decentralized way, should take care for all national or transregional affairs in librarianship, including mobile libraries.

Eventually, in 2005 this led to the implementation of a very useful website called **fahrbibliothek.de** and its companion weblog **fahrbibliothek.twoday.net**. A handful of deeply committed librarians working in bookmobiles collects all available information concerning mobile libraries in Germany, and to a smaller extent in Europe.

On this website you can find direct links to the homepages of all 97 bookmobiles, for example. There is a lot of information about new and old bookmobiles, about the manufacturers and their technical developments. You can also find many links with additional info. On the startpage of this site there is even a link to your own homepage of bibliotecas moviles (ACLEBIM) and I've seen that you have listed this weblog on your site, too. (Fahrbibliothek Alemania).

Generally speaking, every bit of information which might be of interest for mobile libraries is listed here. In the weblog you can find all sorts of media coverage about bookmobiles and their activities.

These people also conducted the survey of mobile libraries in Germany in 2008, where I found the greater part of the facts and figures that I presented to you today. They also organise regional meetings in some of the northern states of Germany and whenever you have a question about mobile libraries they will help you via email or telephone. Of course all this has to be done besides their jobs as librarians!

They have been operating this website for 5 years now and I use it frequently, about 2 or 3 times a week just to be up to date!

In summary, it can be said that Germany has never had a national mobile library organisation and we have never had a national congress of mobile libraries either!

A good example of how decentralized our system is is the city of Berlin. Here we have 9 bookmobiles, but these are operated by 6 different city districts which are completely independent from one another. Therefore a thing like „the mobile libraries of Berlin“ doesn't even exist! If you want to have some information on these buses you have to go to the homepages of each district public library separately and search for the mobile library. Even the financial situation of those library buses differs widely from district to district. Admittedly, Berlin is something like a special case, but I still think this is very strange.

At least we do have these 2 websites that provide you with everything you need to know about bookmobiles!

IV. The Bookmobile System Of Munich

Please allow me a short look back at the development of the Munich mobile libraries, because that development is completely different from that of any other city in Germany.

You've already heard about the book-tram of Munich which ran from 1928 to 1970. It shows that Munich was a special case from

the very beginning! This has been the only book-tram ever in Germany and I only heard of one other city in Europe with such a vehicle: this was Budapest, Hungary, in the 1950's.

Then we got our first library bus in 1951, which had 15 stops on a weekly basis.

In 1956, Munich continued its unusual way, when the city's library department and the department for schools and education decided to work together. They decided to close all those small and old class libraries in the schools step by step and that the future supply of literature should be delegated to the public library. So over the next couple of years 3 bookmobiles were put into service which drove exclusively to elementary and secondary schools. A good part of the financing of the books for those library buses came from the school department!

So since early 1964 Munich has had 3 so-called „junior buses“ that provided about 65 schools in the city with literature on a biweekly basis.

In 1967, the Munich mobile libraries came up with yet another unheard-of idea: they established another new bus which drove exclusively to factories and companies with 500 to 2000 employees. These were for example the Bavarian Radio And Television Corporation, Dornier aircraft works, Philip-Morris-Cigarettes-Company or the main garage of the municipal transport services.

So until 1988 we had 6 library buses driving around town, then an economy measure put an end to this unique idea of a library bus for factories.

At present we still have 5 bookmobiles which is a pretty impressive figure I think. No other city in Germany except Berlin, which is a special case, has 5 mobile libraries. The number of buses is even more astonishing when I tell you that Munich, with its 1.200.000 inhabitants, also has a fully developed system of public libraries!

We have one really big central library and 24 branches in about every district of the town. All public libraries have the same opening hours: from 10 o'clock in the morning to 7 o'clock in the evening, Monday till Friday. The central library is also open on Saturdays.

4 of our 5 buses are junior-buses for elementary schools only and one bus drives to the outskirts of Munich with media for adults and children.

So what are the working conditions in our junior buses?

Each bus team consists of 2 librarians, 3 staff members and 1 driver. There is only one librarian, 2 staff members and the driver in the bus at the same time. The other librarian and one staff member work in the office and they will help out, if somebody is off sick or on holiday.

We usually drive to 2 or 3 elementary schools each day. Wherever it is possible we directly drive onto the schoolyard to make it as safe as possible for the classes to visit the bus. Sometimes though we have to park the bus just in front of the main entrance of the school.

Every school is visited on a biweekly basis, which means that each of our 4 junior buses cares for 20 – 24 elementary schools, in total we serve 86 schools out of the 141 we have in Munich.

Lending starts with the beginning of school, at 8 o'clock. Each class has about 15 minutes in the bus. During that time the children have to give back their books and media, choose some new ones and charge them at the driver's counter. They can borrow up to 20 items at a time and can keep them for 4 weeks. One renewal for another 4 weeks is possible.

Reminder charges for overdue loans are 15 cents per item every 14 days.

Before the beginning of each school year, in September, we send a

schedule to the teachers, where they can coordinate the visiting time of the bookmobile with each other.

The schoolchildren who come to us are usually between 7 and 11 years old. In the afternoon, while we are still parking in front of a school, the pupils come from their homes, often bringing their younger and sometimes older siblings with them. Frequently, their mothers also come along with them. In some cases our buses serve as meeting point for the mothers of the neighbourhood which is quite nice, but it can be annoying when the bus is crowded with people and you don't have enough room to put the books back into the shelves.

The stock in our buses is absolutely orientated towards the needs of our customers, who are children from the age of 3 to roughly 13 years and of course teachers, educators and young mothers.

Therefore we have picture-books for the youngest, easy-readers for the kids of the first and second grades up to young-adult fiction. Of course we also stock all kinds of non-fiction books and special literature for teachers and mothers.

With regard to audio-visual media we work with the strict guideline that nothing with the imprint “suitable for children of 12 years or older” will be on offer in our buses. In the past we've really had some trouble in this regard with teachers and over-protective parents. So this leads to some strange coincidences, for example we have all volumes of the Harry Potter books, but none of the corresponding films, because these are rated “12 years or older”.

The visitors of our junior buses can choose from about 5000 media in the shelves. The number of fiction and non-fiction books in the bus is about equal and approximately 30% of the whole stock is audio-visual media.

In total each bus has 25.000 books, magazines and audio-visual media at its disposal. A large amount of this is on circulation, the rest is either in the depot or in the bus.

As regards our purchase budget I can say that it slightly differs from year to year, but on average we get about 30.000 € per year for each of the 4 junior buses and about 20.000 € for our bus for adults. With this money we are able to buy around 3.500 new items per year for each junior bus and around 2000 for the adult bus. Two-thirds of the budget is spent on books, one third on audio-visual media.

In comparison to the budget of bookmobiles in other cities in Germany I would say we have a pretty good funding here in Munich.

So why do we get so much money? Because our statistics are pretty good!

Each junior bus has between 4500 to 5000 active readers per year, the bus for adults has 1300. The lendings for a junior bus are about 125.000 per year. If you add the renewals we are talking about a total of 165.000 per bus.

When you hear these figures you have to keep in mind that the junior buses are on tour only during 38 weeks of the year, because the schools are on holiday during 14 weeks. During the school holidays our buses are not in operation. We use that time for maintenance service for the buses and our staff is asked to spend their annual holidays, which are 30 work days, during that period of time.

Our bus for adults is running during 50 weeks of the year, but it can't compete with the figures of the junior buses: there are about 75.000 lendings per year; when we add the renewals we speak about 100.000.

In total the department of mobile libraries serves 20.000 active readers each year who borrow 750.000 media from our buses.

Since I don't want to convey the impression that everything is absolutely fabulous regarding the Munich mobile libraries, let me tell you about one thing that I find really annoying: our charging

system! You may not believe it, but we have been working with the same card charging system in our buses since 1956! The driver does the charging and on a good day he has to write about 1000 library card numbers on the book cards! You can probably imagine how exhausting this is and it is also a source of error as it leads to some transposed numbers during the day.

Together with the director of the Munich public libraries we've been fighting for years with the cities EDP-department for the installation of an online computer charging system in the bookmobiles. We were not successful for a long time, because the security standards of the city's firewall are incredibly high. Then in July of this year we finally achieved a breakthrough, when all parties committed agreed to install a special web-client for the mobile libraries. The data transfer will then be done with the UMTS-system.

Now it looks like we will have online computer charging in the first bus towards the end of next year.

This was the best news this year, believe me!

The main purpose of the Munich mobile library system is definitely to improve the reading skills of children. Since reading is considered to be one of the most important competences of mankind we do as much as we can, in co-operation with the school teachers, to encourage that skill. It is our firm belief that once a child takes pleasure in reading books this will sustain, at least in a certain way, during adolescent life and adulthood. But the seed must be sown when the child goes to elementary school, maybe even earlier.

At the schools where we have stops with our bookmobiles the children come to us as soon as they start the second grade during their lessons! This is encouraged by the teachers and I'd say that about 99% of the kids want to have a library card. The bookmobile visit every fortnight creates group dynamics, every

kid wants to be part of it. Because of this we also get lots of migrant children who would otherwise never step into a library. But if they find fun and pleasure in borrowing books and other media from the bookmobile, they're likely to use a public library after leaving elementary school.

When the children are in the third grade still 75% of them are regular readers in our library bus. In the 4th grade the quota is around 60%.

At the end of the 4th grade all children have to leave elementary school. Since we want them to become familiar with the closest public library, we introduce the librarian working there to the classes as their new contact person and he or she can tell the kids all they need to know about the public library. At the same time the librarian arranges a guided tour for the class in the library.

What more can you do to lead and tie the kids to libraries?

Thank you very much for your attention!