

## **National Recommendations for Action for the Preservation of the Written Cultural Heritage 2015 – a summary**

The records in archives and libraries in Germany are the **memory of the cultural nation of Germany**. From the documents of Charlemagne to the Stasi files, from the compositions of a Johann Sebastian Bach to the literary estate of the Nobel Prize winner Günter Grass, from the earliest printing of Gutenberg around 1450 to the paperbacks of the 20th century, from the first German daily newspaper from the year 1609 to the press diversity of today – **the written heritage in Germany is rich in quantity and quality**. Collectively, it constitutes the intellectual basis of our society in a political, social, legal, cultural, scientific – in every respect! Archives and libraries preserve the magnificent knowledge of human progress, likewise the evidence of dreadful errors and transgressions of our history rich in continuity and disruptions.

After the Second World War with large losses of archives and libraries, there was success in gradually building up efficient institutions. These have contributed significantly to education and training, to the prosperity of our country and, last but not least, to Germany's standing in the world. In his ground-breaking speech on 8th May 1985 the Federal President, Richard von Weizsäcker, made a commitment to the use and necessity of an active and open culture of remembrance for the development of our country and, in this way, increased once again the standing of the memory institutions, archives and libraries. After the reunification of Germany, infrastructures were restored and rebuilt – among these were many valuable archives and libraries.

Despite, or perhaps because of this great progress, dangers and challenges can be all the more clearly identified: the **massive damage to written records due to acidic paper, to the frequently still inadequate storage and to significantly changing environmental and climatic influences. Decisive and coordinated action is required.**

The floods along the River Elbe in 2002, the fire in the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek (Duchess Anna Amalia Library) in Weimar in 2004 and the collapse of the Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln (Historical Archive of the City of Cologne) in 2009 made a wider public aware of the extent of possible danger. From all three catastrophes knowledge was gained for improved preventive protection (also by establishing numerous emergency associations) and for effective coordination of the long-term preservation of cultural heritage.

**The most important finding was and is, however: the everyday risks of the gradual degeneration of the cultural memory, be it by paper deterioration, damage due to usage, brittle paper and objects caused by inadequate storage or the increasing changes in climate and environment, are significantly larger than the unfortunate consequences of a few catastrophic events such as fire, floods or buildings collapsing.**

**Therefore, in addition to more effective prevention of disasters, systematic, nationally-coordinated conservation must be organised against invisible deterioration.** The key areas here are the mass deacidification of papers, the restoration of valuable individual objects according to international standards, a systematic improvement in storage including,

among other things, protective packaging and finally, measures for the nationwide coordination of the preservation of originals and digitisation.

In 2009 the **Allianz Schriftliches Kulturgut Erhalten (Alliance for the Preservation of the Written Cultural Heritage)** handed over a memorandum “Zukunft bewahren” (Preserving the Future) to the Federal President Horst Köhler. The extent of the damage and the challenges facing the archives and libraries were described in this on 17 pages. Politics swiftly took up the issue of better protection of cultural heritage and set up a coordination office at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Berlin State Library) for an initial period of five years. Together with those responsible at the archives and libraries this office was able to prepare an extensive inventory now available:

**“The preservation of the written cultural heritage in archives and libraries in Germany. National recommendations for action for the Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien (BKM) (German Government’s Representative for Culture and Media) and the Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) (Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs)”.**

In libraries a priority of around **9 million volumes** from the years 1851 to 1990 due to the respective national and regional Legal Deposit Laws are to be treated by mass deacidification, in archives up to the amount of **1.8 million metres** of shelf space. During this period, wood-containing paper and acid glue were used in the manufacture of books.

**In order to be able to treat at least one per cent of the endangered or damaged written cultural heritage per year for conservation and restoration purposes, an amount of 63.2 million euros must be invested. Up to now, however, an amount of only 10.9 million euros (as per 2012) is available.** Since the preservation of the written cultural heritage is a collective national task of high priority, **it is recommended that the Federal and State Governments agree on a joint funding programme and so make urgent, necessary measures possible in the archives and libraries and introduce these rapidly.** The exchange of experience, coordination, prioritisation, together with better work organisation in specialised processes, will create distinct synergy effects and efficiency gains in the medium and long term and reduce the costs of the preservation of originals for all concerned.

The calculation of measures and costs take into account that essentially only unique material and, in cases of multiple copies of printed books, only one original can as a rule be preserved permanently in each case. Prints before 1850 were not produced by machine and will be treated as handprinted copies like unique items. Books after 1850 are also to be preserved permanently as multiple copies if they belong to significant collections and if as a collection, as part of an important whole, they deserve to be preserved (these include, e.g. the private libraries of important personages).

Archives and libraries are participating actively in the digitisation of cultural heritage to make valuable records and those in great demand more visible and more easily accessible for teaching and research, education and training, culture and science. Damage of fragile originals due to use can also be prevented or reduced by digitisation. **Digitisation cannot, however, replace the preservation of originals.** Certificates and documents, manuscripts and letters, books and magazines, photographs and maps, sheet music and other materials are to be kept permanently in at least one copy if they have been classified as worthy of being preserved according to the collection regulations of archives and libraries.

The principle aim of the preservation of originals is to permanently save contemporary record providers and therefore the object in its original form. The originals from the archives and libraries are, in their entirety, an immense wealth which – to use Goethe's words – contribute incalculable interest.

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