

Der Stille auf der Spur

An Exploration of Quiet Study Spaces in German and British University Libraries

Christine Niehoff

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**Der Stille auf der Spur –
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British University Libraries**

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
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Vorwort

2017 kommen die Preisträgerinnen des b.i.t.-online-Innovationspreises von den Hochschulen in Berlin und Potsdam.

Ausgezeichnet wurden:

Eva Bunge: Citizen Science in der Bibliotheksarbeit – Möglichkeiten und Chancen (Berlin)

Eva May: Wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken und Stadtentwicklung (Potsdam)

Christine Niehoff: Der Stille auf der Spur. An Exploration of Quiet Study Spaces in German and British University Libraries (Berlin)

So unterschiedlich die Themen der Arbeiten auch sind, ihnen gemeinsam ist, dass sie vor dem Hintergrund neuer gesellschaftlicher und technologischer Entwicklungen auf die veränderte Rolle und Bedeutung von (wissenschaftlichen) Bibliotheken eingehen.

Die mögliche Beteiligung Freiwilliger an wissenschaftlicher Forschung wird in der Masterarbeit von **Eva Bunge** anhand von sechs Citizen-Science-Projekten an Bibliotheken unterschiedlichen Typs und unterschiedlicher Größe dargestellt.

Umfangreiche und personalintensive Vorhaben der Bestandserschließung wie die Erfassung von viktorianischen Klavierstücken, von Illustrationen in historischen wissenschaftlichen Zeitschriften, Landkarten aus dem 19. Jahrhundert oder historischen Schiffslogbüchern, die Transkribierung von Briefen oder der Idee von Citizen Science nahekommenden kartographischen Katalogergänzungen können nur durch die Mitwirkung von Freiwilligen umgesetzt werden. So bringt Citizen Science bei geeigneten Projekten ungeachtet des nicht zu unterschätzenden Ressourceneinsatzes und der notwendigen intensiven Kommunikation mit den Laienforschern signifikante Mehrwerte für die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, eine Verbesserung des Kundenkontakts, Steigerung des Bekanntheitsgrades und bessere Vernetzung mit der Wissenschaft mit sich.

Kultur- und Wissensinstitutionen, damit auch Bibliotheken, erfahren in einer Zeit, in der Stadtentwickler Wert auf eine positive Wahrnehmung von Kommunen als Wissensstadt oder Kulturmetropole legen, eine erhöhte Aufmerksamkeit, sei es, dass Bibliotheken Teil urbaner Umgestaltung werden, sei es, dass spektakuläre Bibliotheksneubauten das Stadtbild mit prägen.

Anhand von unterschiedlichen Arten wissenschaftlicher Bibliotheken in Cottbus und Wildau, Barcelona, Kopenhagen und Utrecht untersucht **Eva May**, ob sich ein für Öffentliche Bibliotheken und ihren Bezug zur Stadtentwicklung erarbeitetes „Place-Space-Relations-Modell“ übertragen lässt. Architektonisch wirken auch wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken oft als Placemaker mit einer großen Offenheit zum Stadtraum, attraktiven Außenräumen, einsehbaren, zum Aufenthalt einladenden großzügigen Eingangsbereichen. Eine noch bessere Sichtbarkeit und Ansprache neuer Zielgruppen kann durch kreative Partnerschaften beispielsweise mit Museen erreicht werden.

Dennoch, wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken haben andere Aufgabenbereiche und Kernaufgaben als Öffentliche Bibliotheken, sie sind hauptsächlich den Informationsbedürfnissen der Institution und deren Mitgliedern, der Unterstützung von Forschung und Lehre und nicht der Öffentlichkeit verpflichtet. Auch kann die gewisse Hochschwelligkeit der Angebote die Ansprache neuer, nicht-akademischer Zielgruppen, eine soziale Mischung verhindern.

Bibliotheken, zumal Hochschulbibliotheken, werden gemeinhin mit ruhigen Bereichen gleichgesetzt und haben im universitären Umfeld ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal in Bezug auf die Bereitstellung von Lern- und Arbeitsbereichen, welches ungeachtet von Öffnungen der Bibliotheken für zwanglosen Aufenthalt nach wie vor und zwar stärker als zuvor von den Studierenden eingefordert wird. In der Konsequenz werden sowohl ruhige als auch kommunikative Bereiche in den Bibliotheken erwartet.

Christine Niehoff untersucht aus persönlicher Perspektive – gestützt auch durch chronologische Geräuschaufzeichnungen und die Kartierung von Geräuschquellen – in ihrer ethnografischen Arbeit Geräuschkulissen, (innen-)architektonische Aspekte wie Raumgestaltung und Einrichtung, Lärmregulierung durch die Einrichtung bzw. Selbstregulierung. Am Beispiel von zehn Bibliotheken in Großbritannien und Deutschland zeigt sie auf, mit welchen Mitteln Bibliotheken eine akustische Zonierung zu erreichen versuchen und welche unterschiedlichen Lösungen zur Schaffung von verschiedenen Ruhezonem gewählt werden, um den Ansprüchen der Nutzer gerecht zu werden.

Karin Holste-Flinspach

Vorsitzende der Kommission für Ausbildung und Berufsbilder des BIB

**Der Stille auf der Spur –
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British University Libraries**

Masterarbeit

Kurzbeschreibung

Die Autorin untersucht aus persönlicher Perspektive – gestützt auch durch chronologische Geräuschaufzeichnungen und die Kartierung von Geräuschquellen – in ihrer ethnografischen Arbeit Geräuschkulissen, (innen-)architektonische Aspekte wie Raumgestaltung und Einrichtung, Lärmregulierung durch die Einrichtung bzw. Selbstregulierung. Am Beispiel von zehn Bibliotheken in Großbritannien und Deutschland zeigt sie auf, mit welchen Mitteln Bibliotheken eine akustische Zonierung zu erreichen versuchen und welche unterschiedlichen Lösungen zur Schaffung von verschiedenen Ruhezeiten gewählt werden, um den Ansprüchen der Nutzer gerecht zu werden.

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Introduction

From 2004 to 2006, I studied Fine Art at Goldsmiths in London. In 2005 I began working as a shelving and weekend library assistant in the Goldsmiths library. At the same time a new Head introduced new policies. Rules were relaxed and students were allowed to eat and drink in the library. Talking was no longer discouraged. The students were invited to have fun and feel at home. And the library changed. Some people liked this, others didn't. As a library assistant, I remember a string of complaints from postgraduate students about noise, demanding at least a separate space for postgraduates as they exist in many UK libraries.

As someone who, as a student, finds it difficult to think when others talk the library was too noisy for me as well. I stayed away and only came to the library for my job and to collect books I read at home.

Ten years later, in 2015, I returned to "my" library to interview the AV librarian for an assignment for the MA LIS course at Humboldt University. I had been told that the ground floor was now a large lounge area with a café so this came as no surprise, especially since such a development did not contradict my experience in any way. What I had not anticipated at all was the zoning policy that had been introduced declaring the upper floors quiet study zones. I was very surprised. Where had this come from? What had happened? Was it a singular incidence or was this a wider trend?

A few isolated attempts to study in German university libraries in the last two years had not been very satisfactory but I had not given them much of a chance. I needed a closer look, both in Germany and the UK.

Literature Review

The role of academic libraries has changed dramatically over the past decades. The increased use of electronic resources and changes in pedagogy (Jamieson, 2013; Montgomery, 2014; Black and Roberts, 2006; Franks and Asher, 2014; Howard, 2012) have led to dramatic changes in the way libraries are being used by students. Collaborative and social styles of learning necessitate flexible group study spaces where talking is not only allowed but encouraged and supported. Rising gate counts and falling rates of circulation also mean that providing study space rather than print resources has become one of the key jobs of university libraries (Bennett, 2009).

Declining circulation figures and what temporarily looked like falling gate counts in the US in the 1990s (Shill and Tonner, 2003) led to a fear of deserted libraries (Carlson, 2001). In an attempt to make libraries more popular cafés and other social spaces seemed to promise a future for libraries that felt threatened (Fansa, 2008, p. 21; Gayton, 2008; Albanese, 2003). Instead, Shill and Tonner showed a relationship between raising gate counts and new library buildings or refurbishments (2004, p.149). The importance of a pleasant and inspiring environment for learning has also been shown by Jamieson (2013). Together, social spaces and new study forms greatly changed the atmosphere in academic libraries. There was enthusiasm for the new buzzing library among many library staff as “librarians have been working to shift the traditional ‘shushing’ librarian image to one of a more modern, technology-savvy guru who welcomes noise as a part of the job.” (Yelinek and Bressler, 2013, p.42) Bernstein, for example, revels in this new library: “It has replaced or usurped the student union, the recreation center, the dining hall, and the university center as the most ‘happening’ place on campus. [...] The library is a place to escape, relax, chill-out, psyche-up, eat, drink, and be merry.” (2007, p.5) The cliché of the grey librarian shushing oppressed users in drab and dusty environments was seen as a thing of the past: “Bun-headed women with steely wills, ‘shushing’ mouths, crooked fingers, and faces of iron do not patrol the floors; food and beverage is no longer confiscated at the door, the atmosphere is somewhat carefree, casual, and inviting.”(Bernstein, 2007, p.5) Bennet is equally excited about the new animated atmosphere in academic libraries when he summarises findings from an earlier report:

“[This space] will be filled, literally every chair, . . . and they’re all talking at the same time. And the hum that rises above this is just amazing. And they don’t care. . . . There’s all this din that occurs [from] hundreds of students in the same space, all working together and all talking at the same time. [...] We just beam with pride.” (2005, p.12)

Instead of becoming obsolete libraries have become ever more popular (Bell, 2008). With student numbers rising, far from being deserted, they have emerged as the prime study space on campus, leading Albanese to speak of a renaissance of campus libraries (2003, p.34). But the newly found popularity has also brought problems:

“The reality is that the academic library has succeeded all too well as a popular campus space, especially if it has been recently renovated or newly con-

structed. These days the problem has nothing to do with getting the campus community into the library; it's getting them to keep the noise down when they are there." (Bell, 2008)

Bell goes on to say that many students not only lack other quiet spaces for studying but also expect quiet in the library (2008).

What enthusiastic supporters of the new vibrant libraries like Bernstein tend to overlook is the continuing need for more "traditional" services such as quiet study space (Bailin, 2011; Braun, 2010; Gardner and Eng, 2005; Massis, 2012). Despite the emphasis on interactive and collaborative learning and socialization, "millennial students do not always work in groups or with technology; these students still benefit from some traditionally configured spaces for quiet contemplation and study in libraries" (Lippincott 2010, 35). Cha and Kim revealed that noise level was the second most important space attribute for students and was rated higher than aesthetics or atmosphere, interestingly enough both for individual and group study. They go on to say that their findings were "in line with many other studies that have found that students prefer to sit in a quiet space" (2015, p.277). Burel et al. discovered that the "concepts of quiet and distraction are so relevant to graduate students that they are mentioned in all methods employed in the study." (2016, p.763) May and Swabey also concluded that quiet was one of the top requirements of library space (2015, p.784). „Noise in the library is no trivial matter. It, along with other 'quality of life' factors, such as reliable photocopiers and clean restrooms, make the difference between an academic library that is avoided at all costs and one that is a prime campus destination." (Bell, 2008)

Gayton's concern that what he calls "the 'communal' experience of seeing and being seen by others, quietly engaged in the same serious, studious activity" (2008, p.60) will "become an afterthought, a second-class citizen" (2008, p.64) does not seem to have come true. Through surveys and feedback users ensured that quiet areas remained relevant and have in fact become a focus of attention in recent years. 89% of participants in an online survey at a department library at the university in Hamburg thought that "Ruhe ein sehr wichtiger oder wichtiger Faktor bei der Entscheidung für die Nutzung einer Bibliothek wäre, 93 Prozent bezeichneten Ruhe als angenehm oder sogar unbedingt notwendig". (Eigenbrodt, 2010, p.256) In Rostock, 79.5% of the students surveyed thought that quiet space where talking was explicitly not allowed was most important for their library experience, making quiet the most popular kind of space of all (Ilg, 2014, p.236). A survey asking students about their wishes for study space before a refurbishment at Kassel University Library identified quiet as

one of the most popular aspects (Braun, 2010). And even in a library that was used by 64% of the students for group study, “Quiet/Study” was the „favorite thing about the library” and “noise was one of the top least favorite things”. (Franks and Asher, 2014, p.326) LibQual evaluations also brought to light how dissatisfied many users are with the noise levels in academic libraries in many instances. Just to name a few, in two evaluations at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania in 2006 and 2009, “noise was one of the top issues raised by students who sought a quieter place to study” (Yelinek and Bressler, 2013, pp.40–41). In British Columbia, “2013 LibQual survey comments highlight the need for more quiet spaces in particular”¹. At York St. John University a 2002 evaluation shows the lowest scoring of all questions in this section as well, from undergraduates to faculty.² “Comments from LibQual as well as additional user surveys demonstrated that noise was a problem for McGill University Library in its individual study spaces.” (Lange et al., 2016, p.45) And in Europe, when the University of Limerick ran LibQual “the quiet space question was our lowest scoring of all the questions” (Breen and McCaffrey, 2014, p.41).

Bernstein wrote an interesting statement: “Of course, the library fulfilled the patrons’ expectations. They would not be coming to the library otherwise” (2007, p.12). Leaving aside the fact that students may only come to the library because they don’t have a (better) choice, he does not even consider that students may stay away for exactly the reason that their expectations are not met. And this often has to do with noise. In a study at Cornell University 40% of the questioned students said that noise issues were the reason they had not used the library in the past (Bishop et al., 2012, p.5). In Florida, Burel et al. also learned that “participants expressed a desire for more stringent enforcement of designated quiet spaces in the library. For several people, the inability to predict or control the noise level kept them from using the library.” (Burel et al., 2016, p.765) Vondracek’s study revealed that students who choose to study outside the library think that the library is inconvenient, crowded, and loud (2007, 293). Wiestler found out in 2009 that while 59% of students come to the library for quiet and were mostly satisfied 27% of those who don’t study in the library avoid it because they think it is too noisy (Wiestler, 2009, pp.86–87).

1 http://about-library-010613.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2013/10/UBC_Vancouver_2013_LibQUAL_results.pdf

2 <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/53044407/spring-2002-survey-results-st-johns-university-ny/4>

Quiet has traditionally been one of the hallmarks of libraries. Fansa talks of the atmosphere of quiet concentration as a USP, a unique selling proposition of libraries: “Diese ‘Bibliothekskonzentration’ ist also fast so etwas wie eine Schutzmarke, ein Warenzeichen der Bibliothek” (2008, p.36). He makes a connection with Gayton’s idea of communal experience: “Die Aufgabe der Bibliothek ist es demnach, ihren eigenen ‘communal spirit’ verstehen zu lernen, ihn umsichtig zu kultivieren und so eine ihrer zentralen Qualitäten zu stärken – und sich mit ihr zu behaupten.“ (Fansa 2008, p. 22) Eigenbrodt also points to the unique potential of libraries as quiet study space (2010, p.256) and underlines the importance of quiet but not secluded spaces in the busy contemporary world: “In a social environment characterized by information overload and the omnipresence of media and communication, a quiet but not private space for study and reflection may be a necessity.“ (2013, p.44) Demas agrees: “One of the powerful attractions of libraries is the unique pleasure of being alone, in a quiet place, while simultaneously being in a public place associated with scholarship.“ (2005, p.29) “In der Tat kann die Funktion der wissenschaftlichen Bibliothek als öffentlichem Ort stiller Konzentration als einmalig betrachtet werden, und weitere Studien bestätigen ihre Popularität aufgrund dieses kontemplativen Charakters.” (Schoof, 2010, p.15) Students want and need quiet spaces to work. While they do use the entire campus to study (Eigenbrodt, 2010), quiet and particularly silent spaces are hard to find outside the library. This gives libraries the chance to distinguish themselves as the unique provider of such spaces, in addition and close proximity to group and collaborative areas and café spaces.

And there is an argument to be made for quiet library space that goes beyond personal preference and love for silence. A study by Gordon-Hickey and Lemley reveals that the kind of auditory learning environment a person chooses is a physiological requirement rather than taste or circumstance in their study “Background Noise Acceptance and Personality Factors Involved in Library Environment Choices by College Students”:

“Findings of this study indicate that study environment preference is a genuine auditory event that is not influenced by psychological factors. It appears as though background noise influences on cognitive tasks has physiologic origins, rather than psychological origins. These findings have important ramifications for library users, libraries, and librarians. Findings of the present study validate library user needs for specific auditory work environments for studying, reading, or working to learn new material.” (2012, p.368)

They go on to say that it “appears as though the need for quiet is more common than current library thought acknowledges.” (2012, p.368). They connect personality factors such as introversion and extroversion to required levels of noise or silence for studying. This suggests a basic genetic disposition to learning environments that is physically unalterable: “If a library user says they prefer quiet, based on our results, they have a genuine, physiologic need for quiet.” (Gordon-Hickey and Lemley, 2012, p.368)

This need and demand for quiet does of course not mean that there is less need for collaborative study spaces or social areas. As Bailin describes the ideal situation: “The academic library can be a quiet refuge but can also act as a social gathering place for collaborative learning.” (Bailin, 2011, p.343) Students require group study areas as much as they may need quiet or silent study space. “Several studies (Aplegate, 2009; Bennett, 2007; Holder & Lange, 2014) have stated that library space should meet a broad spectrum of students’ needs in terms of their different preferences and activities.” (Cha and Kim, 2015, p.278) Not only have different students different preferences but what one and the same student needs changes over the course of the academic year as well (Jamieson, 2013). To accommodate all these different student needs, zoning has increasingly become the norm in recent years (Eigenbrodt, 2010, p.257).

The challenge for academic libraries then lies in the acoustic balancing act between those students who need quiet and those who require spaces where they can talk. Because of the way sound travels, dividing a library into a variety of study zones can only really be successful if they are acoustically separated. One big obstacle in this respect is open-plan architecture. (Blume, 2011; Hacker, 2011) Eigenbrodt pinpoints the problem of noise in open-plan environments and the need for separation:

“Anstatt horizontal und auch vertikal offene Gebäude zu planen, in denen sich Geräusche ungehindert ausbreiten können, werden durch akustische Trennung verschieden laute Bereiche geschaffen. Dabei wird der gewünschte Effekt in der Regel nur erzielt, wenn es tatsächlich zu einer akustischen Abschottung kommt.“ (Eigenbrodt, 2010, pp.257-258)

The concept of zoning libraries in all its facets is widely discussed in English language literature. This correlates with the prominence of zoning concepts on British library websites. 32 of the 70 British websites I looked at communicated zoning on their websites, often colour coded and clearly defined. Of the German libraries whose websites

I went through, roughly 30% had any information on different study areas, often very brief. However, just because something is not extensively communicated on a website does not mean that it doesn't exist.

My impression is that the German debate around noise management often seems to revolve around engineering rather than noise management. Blume's article on the open-plan library in Magdeburg, for example, is mostly concerned with acoustic insulation such as carpeting, acoustic cubes or baffles and buffers in locker doors (Blume, 2011). Out of only 16 presentations that came up in a search for "Zonierung" on the BIB Opus Publikationsserver, most focus on colourful furniture for group study rooms and technology. Some briefly mention the need for separate zones. Only Naumann's contribution on reading rooms discusses the necessity for both collaborative and quiet spaces in any depth (2009, pp.12–13). Similarly, in his report on the refurbishment of the university library in Konstanz, Oliver Kohl-Frey discusses zoning extensively and interestingly not only differentiates between individual and group study zones but also between individual study space and three special areas planned for specifically quiet individual study, including a reading room (2014, p.117).

Research Question

Against the background of this need for silence and communal study, I want to explore how quiet the silent study areas in academic libraries really are.

In 2007, Bryant used the method of observation in a study for her MA dissertation in which she explored Open³, a social learning environment in the Pilkington Library at Loughborough University (2007). To my knowledge, no ethnographic studies have been undertaken in relation to silent study space. With ten libraries in the study, my approach is not a case study but could rather be described as an attempt to give an account of what the situation as it is.

Can the approach of zoning as a noise management strategy fulfil the high expectations? Do zoned university libraries in Germany and the UK succeed in providing the quiet atmosphere of concentration that students want and need? And possibly the most important question for somebody embarking on a library career: what can libraries do to make zoning work for the students in need of silence and how far are they responsible for doing so?

Armed with these questions, I went out in search of silence in university libraries.

1. Research Method

1.1 Ethnographic Research in Libraries

Ethnographic research methods have gained popularity in LIS research in recent years. While Bryant still mentioned a relative absence of ethnographic approaches in UK LIS research in 2007 (2007, p.9), four years later Goodman describes a recent increase in popularity (2011, pp.50–56). In the German publication “Bibliothek und Praxis”, British librarian Rosenblum Emary notes in 2015 that the “approach is increasingly popular” (2015, p.139) and a survey by Khoo et al. documents the rising use of ethnographic methods for studying library use and library users (2012). They also note a prevalence of observation and interviews (2012, p.85) and a growing “diversification in the types of methods used” (2012, p.86).

As ethnographic research tries “to fully understand a culture” (Bedwell and Banks, 2013, p.3) ethnographic methods such as observation, interviews, diaries or photo surveys are particularly helpful in trying to better understand the complex behaviour of library users, in the case of a university library primarily students. As Seadle states: “Das Ziel ethnologischer Forschung in LIS ist hauptsächlich, die Benutzer besser zu verstehen.” (2013, p.336) Rosenblum Emary also thinks that “ethnography is a useful method for gaining insight into user needs and wants.” (2015, p.138) Unlike circulation statistics, for example, the use of space, the success of zoning or prevalent types of behaviour in the library are much harder to measure: “when evaluating use of library space, establishing the nature of the activities taking place is not as straightforward as producing quantitative data.” (Bryant 2009, p.9). Goodman sees the method of observation as particularly useful: “sometimes the best ideas for great change can come from these simple observations.” (2011, p.66).

Ethnographic research often uses the technique of triangulation. This means a combination of several methods to obtain a more complex and multi-faceted picture and either refute or validate assumptions. As Cowan puts it: “Each instrument was chosen on one hand to bring in unique data and on the other hand to produce data that would become meaningful in the context of the cumulative data gathered by the entire study.” (Cowan 2012) I chose two methods: observation and expert interviews. By observing student behaviour I hoped to get a clearer picture of the current general situation of quiet and silent study in zoned university libraries. How loud are the li-

Die Autorin untersucht aus persönlicher Perspektive – gestützt auch durch chronologische Geräuschaufzeichnungen und die Kartierung von Geräuschquellen – in ihrer ethnografischen Arbeit Geräuschkulissen, (innen-)architektonische Aspekte wie Raumgestaltung und Einrichtung, Lärmregulierung durch die Einrichtung bzw. Selbstregulierung. Am Beispiel von zehn Bibliotheken in Großbritannien und Deutschland zeigt sie auf, mit welchen Mitteln Bibliotheken eine akustische Zonierung zu erreichen versuchen und welche unterschiedlichen Lösungen zur Schaffung von verschiedenen Ruhezeiten gewählt werden, um den Ansprüchen der Nutzer gerecht zu werden.

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