

A Small Library With Big Goals - The Library For German Language And Literature

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Abstract:

I would like to speak about the Library of the Department for German Language and Literature at the University of Tartu. The University of Tartu is one of the oldest universities in the Nordic countries, founded in 1632. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the situation in our country was changing. We had to build up new society, a new educational system. The example of our library illustrates the developments in Estonia very well. In many areas we had to start from scratch. When learning foreign languages, it is natural that the dictionaries, lexicons and scientific literature are at students' disposal, but in Tartu it was not so. The first German Professor in Tartu – Claus Sommerhage¹ - started establishing a library. Without intensive support of the German and Swiss funds our library would not exist today. Our library is getting better every day, the students and lecturers use it more and more often.

Keywords: Developing process; importance of financing, closeness to readers, supporting the study process, social gathering place

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1. Introduction

Today I would like to talk about a small library, first and foremost about the advantages of a small library as a librarian sees them. The role of the library has changed and is changing all the time but we cannot forget the main mission of the library – to offer the

¹ Claus Sommerhage (1950 in Hamm – 2003 in Tartu) 1992-2003 the Professor of German Literature at the University of Tartu

book and the place for using it. The role of the librarian in a small library is to be a consultant, a source of information and the person who keeps the stocks in order.

2. Brief history of the University of Tartu.

I will start my presentation with a small overview of the University of Tartu as our library is a part of the university and it is not possible to observe them apart. The University of Tartu is the oldest university in Estonia and one of the oldest in the Northern countries. On 30 June 1632, King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden signed the Foundation Decree of *Academia Dorpatensis*, which marks the beginning of our university's history.

We can distinguish five periods when we speak about the history of the University of Tartu:

1. The Swedish period 1632-1710
2. The Imperial Tartu University 1802-1918
3. 1919-1940 Tartu University in the Republic of Estonia
4. 1944-1989 Tartu State University (in the Soviet times)
5. 1991 - Tartu University in the newly independent Republic of Estonia

I only describe three of them as the important ones for my presentation.

The first, the so-called "Swedish period", is important while it turned a small provincial town to the university town. The Town Council was interested in having the university here to restore its former prosperity. Tallinn and Riga were big and important centres and not at all interested in the university and the noisy and hectic young men - students.

Sweden in its turn wanted to:

- strengthen the Lutheran religion in the former Catholic country;
- strengthen the presence of the Swedish kingdom.

The students were mostly Swedes and Finns. We are proud that our university is so old but in fact the university, established during the Swedish period, was not one of the best recognized universities in Europe.

The university in Tartu functioned with the Faculties of Philosophy, Law, Theology, and Medicine, enjoying the privileges similar to those granted to the University of Uppsala. The University of Tartu was closed in 1710 after the Swedish army had surrendered to the Russian forces after the defeat in the Northern War.

The second period of the history of the university was 1802-1918 "reopening of the university". This period can be characterized as the prosperity of the university. The Baltic Germans needed the university to educate their children. After the French Revolution studying abroad was not allowed. Russia also needed its own university. So in Tartu the European science and the Russian state met. The Germans wanted to have a small Heidelberg or Göttingen and somehow they succeeded in it. The official language at the university was German and the religion was Lutheran. The 19th century was the period of prosperity of the university, the scientists K. E. von Baer, J. W. Struve and many others show us the level of scientific research in Tartu at that time.

The teaching of Germanic languages also goes back to this period and has long traditions. Already in 1865 the Department for German Language at the University of Tartu was

established. The first professor at the department was Leo Meyer², a linguist from Göttingen who stayed in Dorpat for 33 years. The number of students increased every day, Rutiku and Kegelmann (2003).

3. Overview of the foundation of German Library.

I concentrate my attention on the fifth period which begins in 1991 while at that time our library was established. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the situation in our country was changing. We had to build up new society, a new educational system. The example of our library illustrates the developments in Estonia very well. In many areas we had to start from scratch. When learning foreign languages, it is natural that the dictionaries, lexicons and scientific literature are at students' disposal, but in Tartu it was not so. The first German DAAD-Professor³ in Tartu – Claus Sommerhage - started establishing a library. Among the many names the DAAD-Lecturer Claus Sommerhage should be emphasized. In 1992-1997 Dr. Claus Sommerhage was Guest Professor at the Department for German Language and Literature, 1997-1999 Extraordinary Professor. He innovated new curricula in teaching German literature, especially Modern German Literature. Since his coming only the overview courses had been taught. He started with analytical literature seminars, Rutiku and Kegelmann (2003). The most important thing he did for the department was establishing our library. He knew that without a library teaching literature was impossible. As Sommerhage had said we had a couple of copies of the novel *Aula* by Hermann Kant on our shelves.⁴ He was right. He started looking for funds in Germany and Switzerland, he used his own connections and personal charm. Without intensive support of the German and Swiss funds our library would not exist today.

4. Financing, programmes, funds.

Our library is unique because until 2003 there was no budget for it. Nevertheless, it was increasing with every day. At the beginning many books were donated to our library. Tartu is an old university town and professors and lecturers had their own very good libraries. Many professors and lecturers decided to give their German books to our library.

The theatre "Vanemuine" liquidated its library in 1999 and we received all their books in the German language. From there we have our 23-volume complete works of Dostoevsky from 1922 which is considered to be the best Dostoevsky translation since then.

The oldest book in our library dates back to 1780⁵.

We also received books from our German friends. More than 15 years Professor Norbert Nail from the University of Marburg equipped us with every kind of books and journals about the German language and linguistics.

Since 2001 our library is in the project of Gebert RUF Fund - the Swiss Baltic Net for the Swiss Libraries and Swiss Literature in the Baltic States. We can order German Swiss literature every year for 1000 ChFr. The sum is not big but very valuable for our library. The project also coordinates the work of Schweizer Lesezimmer in the Baltic States. We

² Leo Meyer (1830 in Bledeln near Hannover – 1910 in Göttingen, at the University of Dorpat 1865-1898. The list of his works look: Leo Meyer as University Dozent and Linguist, in : TRÜ Toimetised Nr. 125, Tartu 1962, 74-81

³ DAAD- Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service)

⁴ In Memoriam Claus Sommerhage (2005),

⁵ Versuch eines vollständigen Wörterbuches der Hochdeutschen Mundart in 4 Bänden. –Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1780

meet every year in Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia to present our annual work and discuss our problems. These meetings are always useful and interesting. This time the meeting takes place in Vilnius

In 2005-2007 our library was involved in the programme "Menschen und Bücher" (People and Books), an initiative of the Goethe Institute for Central and Eastern Europe. For our library it was a great privilege to be involved in the programme because our financial resources have always been limited. This time we could order books necessary for us and all our lecturers were involved in the ordering process. So we could efficiently enrich our library and every lecturer could order books for his or her course. The budget was 15, 000 EUR and we could also invite a German author to Tartu.

5. Department libraries at the University of Tartu.

Since 2003 the University Library has pursued the policy of supporting department libraries. Until then the status of a small department library was obscure. At the Department for German Language and Literature the library policy was always clear. We needed a well equipped library for students and lecturers, we were for the open access. Since 2002 our books are in the library system INNOPAC, which makes every process with books very easy and transparent. Sometimes the department libraries are in a bad state, the books are available for very few readers but our policy was different from the very beginning. When we do have a book, people must know about it, they must have access to it.

6. Importance to the students and lecturers.

One of the priorities of our library is its closeness to students and lecturers. We are informed of every need very quickly and for the students it is comfortable that everything about one subject (German language and literature) is concentrated at one place.

Since 1999 the Department for German Language and Literature has its own rooms in the former printing-house in the centre of the town, opposite the university main building. The renovation of the building had been contributed by different foreign embassies. It houses Departments for German, French, Spanish and Scandinavian Languages and is called "Paabel". For our library it gave a possibility to expose all the books better, to create a real library system, to create a room where people like to work. The rooms for the German library in this new building are next to the seminar rooms. The students can use library early in the morning and between the lectures and seminars during the day. Our users are the students of the Department for German Language and Literature, the students of the Language Centre of the University, the Master's course students who study translation and interpretation. Every reader who possesses the university library card is welcome in our library.

Closeness also means that we always consider the requests of the students. In the last years when we received our budget, we have ordered books for the students who need them for writing their Bachelor's or Master's theses. The priority of our library is to be of high scientific quality. This is the direction Claus Sommerhage gave to our library and we still hold on to it. It is sometimes difficult because of our insufficient financing, but we always choose books carefully, ask advice from our German patrons and friends, try to be informed of the newest scientific literature. So we can affirm that our library has been created by professionals and it fulfils its tasks.

One of our main tasks is to support the study process. At the Department for German Language and Literature the main research areas are linguistics, sociolinguistics, contact

and text linguistics as well the Swiss literature and the German literature by women writers and the Baltic-German literature. Some subject areas in our library are very well presented, for example German linguistics, literary science, German history, German language history. In the last years the collection of our dictionaries and lexicons is almost ideal. As translation and interpretation are taught at our university, the collection of these books is almost excellent. We also have a good collection of German language textbooks. We have a sufficient number of copies thanks to "LÜKKA" – EU supporting programme. At our department teaching of modern Swiss literature has long traditions. Associated Professor Eve Pormeister has taught it already for 20 years and even wrote her Doctoral thesis on this subject⁶. She has connections with the Embassy of Switzerland, Swiss Funds, Pro Helvetia. Her special interest is the reason why Swiss literature is so well presented in our library.

7. Pleasant meeting place, nice interior.

Last but not least, in a small department library, the milieu plays a big role. There are people who never go to the main library of the university. They do not like too big bleak rooms without cosy corners, with too many strange people. Our library is a kind of a social gathering place for the students who study the same subject, have the same problems and pleasures. The nice and comfortable interior (enough place for everybody, computers, open the whole day, exhibitions) plays an important role here. As our rooms have interesting architecture, it is possible to establish exhibitions and that is what we regularly do. The last exhibition is from our student who studies art as her minor. She was happy to have an opportunity to show her paintings to her friends and fellow-students. We all can enjoy her colourful and interesting works.

8. Conclusion

In my paper I want to prove that a small library can be as efficient as the big one if we could use ample opportunities it offers. Small libraries have their advantages if the priorities are fixed and not unreal. Certainly there is a danger to degenerate when the development process stops. When people work together and the thankfulness of the users is the main goal of our work, everything is possible.

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⁶ Pormeister, Eve , Bilder des Weiblichen in der deutschsprachigen Schweizer Frauenliteratur. Tartu 2003

