

CURRENT ISSUES

Interview with the New Head of the Library of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law

Abstract: In this article, where Liz Murray, Information Resources Manager at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (IALS) in London, interviews Claudia Holland, Head of the Library of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law, the strategic direction of the new Head Librarian is explored. The strengths of this major international, comparative private law library are considered and the balance between providing electronic access to law resources while still maintaining an excellent legal print collection is examined. The importance of networks and collaboration is also highlighted.

Keywords: law librarians; law libraries; international and comparative law libraries

On a recent trip to the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law, Liz Murray from the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library interviewed the new Head of the Library at the Max Planck Institute of Comparative and International Law.

The Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law is a world renowned law library which has extensive holdings in all languages and from all around the world on international private and commercial law and foreign civil law. The library holds more than 550,000 volumes, adding 6,000 volumes a year. There are subscriptions to 1,600 mostly foreign legal periodicals in print and more than 5,000 e-journals. Two reading rooms provide 85 workspaces for researchers and members.

Claudia Holland has been in post for two years and prior to this, she worked at the University of Leipzig as Law Research Librarian for 25 years. Claudia tells us about her experiences so far at the Institute and her plans for the future.

HAVE YOU ENJOYED YOUR TIME SO FAR AS THE NEW HEAD OF THE MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL PRIVATE LAW LIBRARY?

I have enjoyed the last two years I have spent here at the Max Planck Institute very much because there's a very special atmosphere here at the Institute. Everyone welcomed me warmly and together with the team in the

library, I developed new ideas and encouraged everyone to express their own ideas.

From the very beginning, I introduced a weekly team meeting of all library staff. This was a new initiative and gave the team an opportunity to express their opinions and ideas about how the library works, the organisation and the workflow. By the end of the first six months, at the end of 2016, we had started so many new projects within the library, that by the beginning of 2017, I had to say, hold on a minute, we have to finish the projects we have already started, before we begin new ones!

One remarkable thing we did, for example, was the revision of the Annual Report of the Library 2016, which we edited in a completely new way, with photos, text, charts and graphics, in a much more modern style. That project symbolised, in a very good way, how the team sees itself. They are self-confident, curious about new developments and very motivated. The incredible motivation shown by this team was one of the most impressive things I can remember from the last two years.

HOW IS THIS JOB DIFFERENT TO YOUR PREVIOUS POSTS?

Before taking this post, I worked for more than 25 years in Leipzig University library, as Law research librarian. The library was founded in 1543 and is one of the oldest in Germany, after Heidelberg. I was responsible not only for law, but also for psychology, a discipline belonging to natural sciences, so I had to deal with the transition from printed books and journals twenty years ago to the



Figure 1. The Max Planck Institute building.

modern e-versions: ebooks and e-journals. Ebooks and e-journals are standard material types in psychology nowadays, compared to law where most of the users still use printed books.

In my experience, lawyers use databases to find court decisions or to read an article in an e-journal, but to read a law book they prefer to use a printed text. So it was like sitting between two chairs: on one hand I had to supply psychology researchers and students with very modern material types, whereas the law students and particularly the professors insisted that students knew how to look up legal sources in printed works.

Another big difference was that I looked after a large number of students, supplying them with the literature they needed during their studies, though often the funding was limited. University libraries are funded by the different states “Länder” as we call them, because of our federal system; unfortunately the states don’t always have sufficient money to fund universities as much as they would like, so libraries often have limited funds available. This is very different to the Max Planck Institute: the Max Planck Society is a centrally organised society, funded by the federal government. We have an “Aushängeschild” figurehead function and carry out top-level, specialised research, so the library here is a laboratory for lawyers and researchers, and therefore well-funded.

A final difference is that here in Hamburg, I look after the researchers and I’m head of the library, working to the Directors of the Institute, who want me to run an excellent library, meeting the needs of the researchers;

whereas in Leipzig, at the university library, I was in the middle of a triangle of students, professors and the Director of the library who sometimes had different aims to me.

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF THE THINGS YOU’VE CHANGED SINCE WORKING HERE?

I have always worked in teams where we have a collegiate approach, meeting together, then coming to a decision together. I think the team was quite surprised with this style at first, but now I think they’re used to it and they like it. I prefer an open style of communication with an open door where everyone is welcome to come in; if I see there’s an issue that will take longer to sort out, I will always find time to talk about it.

In fact, when I started working here, I think the library was already in an excellent condition, so there was no need for big changes.

In smaller ways, I introduced a few changes, for example, in our catalogue we have printed materials and electronic materials, such as e-journals. Before I came, there were almost no ebooks acquired by ourselves. Now we have quite a number of law ebooks from the Max Planck Society’s ebook packages, such as Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Springer, and Beck. As our users mainly like to search for materials by classmark, using our classification scheme, all the electronic titles were being

missed, with this type of research. So about 18 months ago, we started to add the classification code to our ebooks. Around 3,500 titles - I do this classification along with my deputy. From 2017 on, I now get a list of 50–60 ebooks a month to classify, which is ideal work for me to calmly carry out on my train journey home every Friday!

Overall, we have reduced our number of suppliers, though we still use smaller suppliers sometimes as we buy from areas that are difficult to access, for example, from the Balkan region, the Middle and Far East and sometimes South America. Another thing we have introduced, is a workflow where we participate in an exchange scheme, so if we have duplicates, we offer them to other libraries, and we also occasionally find titles this way too.

We also buy some eresources in a consortium with other Max Planck libraries. Where there is interest for the same eresource from two or three libraries, these are purchased centrally and we make a small annual contribution towards this.

Looking to the next two to three years, we are currently seeing what the other Institute libraries are planning to do when they leave the classic Aleph OPAC and change to a new resource discovery system. As part of a working group, in the Max Planck Social sciences libraries section, we are currently looking at who the best supplier for us might be; what do we want from the new system and how much will this cost?

We need to ensure that any resources included in the new discovery system will meet our needs as a library for international and comparative private law. We are planning to ask our researchers about this, so we can understand their needs better. Do we want to include articles? Do we want a particular index? Which kind of filters do we want? How do we eliminate information we

don't want, such as non-law materials? We need to decide these things first before we go any further.

At the moment, we are also waiting for our new third Institute Director to start in post, as he may have new ideas about the way he would like this discovery system to be developed. He is interested in digitisation projects, as he is familiar with the Max Planck Institute for the History of Law in Frankfurt and they have many older materials which are digitised. However other directors are keener on printed materials, so I need to sit on different chairs with this issue, in a very positive way.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE LIBRARY COLLECTIONS DEVELOPING OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

We consider the library here as an archive. In eight years' time, we will be celebrating the centenary of the Institute and the library has made huge developments over the last hundred years. We have books which no other library has in the world. For example we are the only library that has a Haitian Code Civil dating from 1826. Haiti lost its copy during the last earthquake, so we gave our copy to the Digital Library of the Caribbean to be digitised so that Haiti can use the text again in an electronic version.

The dilemma is, if we move to emedia, would we lose our function as an archive because we can't be completely sure that we will always have access to the electronic version and this is a concern of the directors as well as myself. We recently decided to stop buying the West reporter series, which was a big decision for us and the directors and I had to be firmly convinced that these



Figure 2. Inside the Max Planck Institute Library.



Figure 3. Open-stack shelving throughout the library. This figure replaces the original Figure 3 for which the necessary consents had not been granted (see Correction Notice <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669619000161>).

materials will continue to be available for US lawyers before we could take this step. There are also certain types of literature which we can replace with emedia such as loose-leaf, as old pages are disposed of anyway, so it's fine to go electronic with them. Sometimes, the print versions are discontinued, for example, the Official Gazettes for some countries stopped publishing the print version, so we had no choice but to stop collecting these.

However if you have a monograph, on a very special subject, it may not be available one day. These are the kind of issues we are dealing with in the library, and as law is a discipline where you can carry out research even 50 years later, the value of a title is much higher than for example a title in the natural sciences or medicine. I think this is a big challenge for us and we will continue to have both print and electronic versions of legal materials.

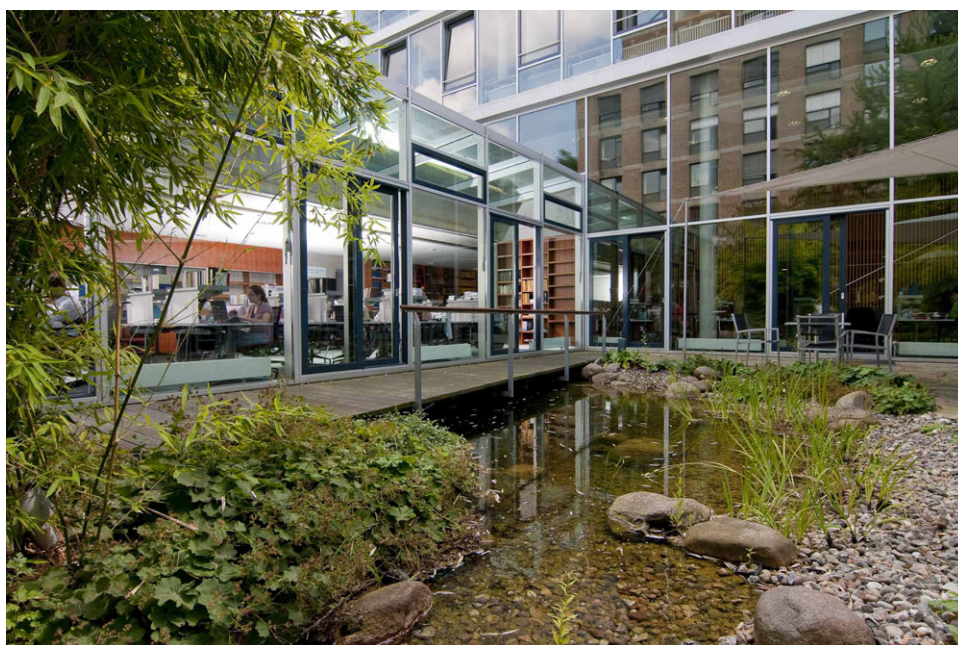


Figure 4. The Max Planck Institute building.



Figure 5. Claudia Holland, Head of the Library at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law in Hamburg.

We can occasionally buy every other edition of a book, for example, but we still have the printed version.

The jurisdiction also plays a part; for example, it is fairly easy to get old editions of books published in the UK, but for international private law books published in Kosovo or Myanmar, we need to have a paper copy, as these can be tricky to obtain.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE LIBRARY SERVICES DEVELOPING OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

Here in the Institute, we aim to provide an excellent service. We can do this because our visitor numbers are relatively confined. Last year we had about 1000 guests, who came from about 60 countries. We also have our researchers, who are members of the Institute.

If the researchers need a book which we don't hold, then we try to buy it. If they request a title that doesn't fit in with our collection, then we try to find a solution: either interlibrary loan or we order the book. I think that is one great offering of our library service: if someone needs a book for his research, then we buy it, and the person requesting the book gets it first, before it goes into the collection.

If a researcher has an enquiry, then they can ask the information desk, during opening times, or any time they can ask me, my deputy or the Academic Services librarian, whenever we are here. We offer this special enquiry and research service Monday to Friday, until

6pm. We also reply promptly to all enquiries at every opportunity.

To make sure key texts are always available, we keep a special collection of heavily used books, so researchers can always find them. Researchers contact me when they need a specific database that we don't hold, and I will try to get access to the database if only for a few months or a year, as required; then they tell me when they don't need it anymore so we can cancel the subscription.

I think what we have to do as a library, is offer an excellent service, as without this, people might not see the need for such a library. There are other institutes in the biomedical section of the Max Planck Society for example, who have given up their libraries because they think that they get everything they need online.

Our close relationship with our researchers should ensure that we are always useful to them and that they value us. At the moment, five members of our library team are preparing a questionnaire to be sent to the Institute members in the autumn; this is to make sure that we continue to provide excellent library services which fully meet their needs. One question will be "what do you want to have in the library catalogue?" so we ensure the new discoverability tool meets all their requirements.

WHICH DIRECTION WILL THE LIBRARY GO IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS?

We constantly have to remind our Institute members that we are a valuable resource and that we are the laboratory for our researchers. To do this, we need to offer modern law literature in up-to-date formats, electronic as well as print. We need to have an excellent and responsive service at all times. We need to continually benchmark ourselves against other libraries. Big university libraries are usually the institutions who initiate major changes, as they look after young people and need to keep moving forward. We are happy to follow, choosing the initiatives that suit us best.

We have some interesting plans, for example, we are going to refurbish our old catalogue space near the information desk, which is currently underused. We are planning to introduce a comfortable seating area with sofas and newspapers (these are currently often overlooked in the room above the café) so researchers can have a break from their studies in a comfortable seating area. We'll have some small tables, so those wanting to can take notes. It will be a calm zone for reading and meeting each other, which is a development you often see in larger university libraries.

I think nobody in librarianship can tell you what is going to happen in 10 years' time: our working lives have changed so much. When I started working as a librarian we used card catalogues to manage the collection, and now we spend our working days sitting in front of a

screen. If somebody had foreseen this 25 years ago, we might not have believed it!

DO YOU WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH OTHER LAW LIBRARIES IN GERMANY?

Here in the Institute Library, we collaborate a lot. Law librarians in Germany have a very good network and in my opinion, you can't work on your own in a closed room, without knowing what's going on outside. For example, if you buy a database on your own it is more expensive than if you buy with other libraries in a consortium and librarians do this in their daily lives.

We have to network and the special needs of law librarians were recognised by our colleagues 40 years ago. We have an association of law librarians called AjBD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für juristisches Bibliotheks- und Dokumentationswesen). They meet twice a year and have an annual conference every autumn with special topics and talks from publishers and database suppliers, who update the librarians with new changes.

Even the small talk and networking is very important. I see it at an international level with the International Association of Law Librarians. I went to the IALL conference for the first time in 2016 and I believe events like this encourage us to widen our views by talking to librarians in other countries, about the same issues. Before international networking, I didn't understand the importance that the role of Research Librarian plays in law

faculties in the United States. I have a better understanding now.

Even though the research areas are widely different the librarians of the 86 institutes have close connections. We also have a mailing list so if anybody needs help or is looking for an article, we email each other to get the article or some advice.

There is a board of five colleagues who organise this network and since April, I have been a member of this board. It's a big challenge, but we can't work without networking, so it's time wisely spent.

HOW DO YOU SET YOUR LONG TERM GOALS?

The main aim is to keep up the excellent service in spite of any challenges that we meet along the way.

In general researchers have needs and it's our job to make sure their needs are met. This may involve thinking about how we order books, how we classify our books, what kind of catalogue are we using to help our researchers find the information they are looking for.

Our aim is to provide our Directors and researchers with the information they need to carry out their research in a quick and efficient way. If they have a question, they want a quick and positive solution. So that's our main goal: to satisfy our researchers.

The library catalogue and collections of this major law library can be found on the library website: <https://www.mpipriv.de/en/pub/library.cfm>.

Biographies

Claudia Holland has worked as a Research Librarian at the Law Faculty of Freiburg, the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe and for more than twenty years at the University Library of Leipzig. Since June 2016 she is Head of the Library at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law in Hamburg (mpipriv.de). She had studied German and French law, librarianship and translation (Spanish).

Liz Murray has worked in and managed various legal libraries and collections, in the higher education and government sectors. Most recently, she was the Information Specialist for Law at King's College; before this she managed the DH/DWP Legal Library for ten years. Since October 2016, Liz has managed the print and electronic collections at the Institute for Advanced Legal Studies.