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From Specialized Collections to Specialized Information Services in German Research Libraries: *Sondersammelgebiete (SSG) 1949 – 2015 to Fachinformationsdienste (FID) 2013 – present.*

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German academic research libraries and their collections of research materials are part of a complex network of [Portals to the Past and to the Future](#) (by Jürgen Seefeldt und Ludger Syré). Against this background, the specialized collections of German and foreign-language research materials have a particularly interesting history in the 20th and 21st century. In the aftermath of the Germany's defeat in WWI, the [Emergency Association of German Science / Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft](#) was founded in 1920 by five German academies and 35 universities and institutes in order to "[avert the danger of the complete collapse of German scientific and scholarly research posed by the present economic crisis](#)" (see: [The Origins of the Notgemeinschaft](#)). The early efforts in respect to libraries and collections were focused on funding networks and infrastructure: how could Interlibrary Loan be used effectively, and how could libraries that had organically built specialized collections in the past assume that responsibility on behalf of all research libraries more intentionally? These beginnings in the early 20th century set the course for a new beginning – post WW2 – in 1949. Like all German institutions of higher learning, the Emergency Association has had to confront its history during the rise of fascism and under the NAZI German regime ([available only in German](#); use [DeepL](#) for translation).

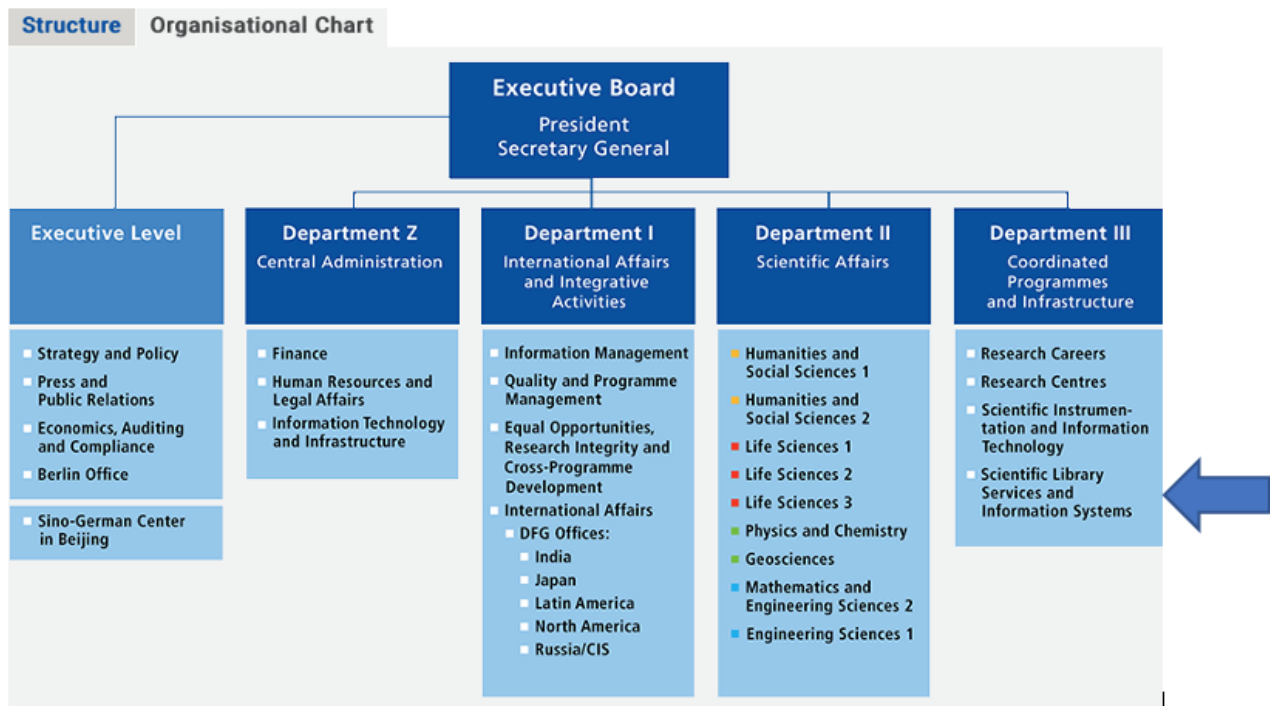
Relevant Chronology

- 1920 [Emergency Association of German Science](#) / Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft
- 1933 – 1945 [The Nationalist Socialist Era](#)
- 1949 – 1951 re-founding as the German Research Foundation / [Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft](#) DFG

Post-1949 Library Funding

- 1949 - 2015 Specialized Research Collections / Sondersammelgebiete SSG; see directory of former / [Ehemalige SSGs in WEBIS](#)
- 2008 to 2010 Evaluation of SSG system, published 2011
- 2013 - present Specialized Research Services / Fachinformationsdienste FID, see [FIDs in WEBIS directory](#) (application opened in 2012)
- 2015 first round of FID evaluation
- 2018 evaluation of the FID system, published in 2019

German Research Foundation [Organizational Chart](#) in 2021.



The German Research Foundation, in its [post-1949](#) form, is a self-governing institution for the promotion of science and research. The foundation administers the funds to support research across the disciplines. The committee for [Scientific Library Services and Information Systems \(LIS\)](#) / [Wissenschaftliche Literaturversorgungs- und Informationssysteme \(LIS\)](#) considers collections, services, and infrastructure in German academic libraries. The German Research Foundation website is complex, and is offered in German and English, but many of the reports and publications are only available in German. The word WISSENSCHAFT is usually translated as SCIENCE, implying work in the natural sciences as opposed to the humanities. In the German language, the term WISSENSCHAFT refers to the entire research enterprise, and is inclusive of all disciplines. The more discipline specific terms in German are Geisteswissenschaften (Humanities) and Naturwissenschaften (Sciences). The best translation for “wissenschaftliche Literatur” is *research resources* in the sense of secondary literature in all disciplines.

A unique aspect of the German Research Foundation is the role of the [Committee for Research Libraries and Infrastructure](#) / Ausschuss für wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken und Informationssysteme (AWBI) in advising academic research libraries. AWBI is a committee of [mostly faculty and some library leaders](#) which advises the German Research Foundation initiative around a national system of access to research materials, especially for materials from abroad, and library infrastructure. This means that the German Research Foundation’s library initiatives have always been guided by

researcher needs, and funded initiatives in research libraries have always been evaluated based on whether the libraries fulfill those researcher needs.

Specialized Research Collections at German Libraries SSG (1949 – 2015).

The German Research Foundation started providing funding for purchase of specialized research materials in 1949, with an emphasis on buying research materials internationally and comprehensively across the disciplines. The initial funding period also prioritized retrospective buying to make up for the collecting gap during National Socialism. The funding created a network of research libraries with specialized research collections. *Webis* is the Internet listing of all [Specialized Research Collections at German Libraries / Sammelschwerpunkte an deutschen Bibliotheken](#).

Specialized Research Services / [Fachinformationsdienste](#) FID (2013 – present)

In the early years, immediately after WW2, funding for international research materials was a priority. Once this system of collecting was mature, with specialized research collections firmly established, the German Research Foundation shifted its focus from funding collections to supporting the virtual research services appropriate to, and made possible by, the digital age. The *webis* portal also provides quick access to the Specialized Research Services / [Fachinformationsdienste](#) FID (2013 – present) and their search portals.

The [webis](#) website:

The screenshot shows the webis website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: "Seite", "Diskussion", "Quelltext anzeigen", and "Versionsgeschichte". The main heading is "Webis - Sammelschwerpunkte an deutschen Bibliotheken". Below this, there is a section titled "Regionale Fachinformationsdienste" with a list of categories: Afrikastudien, Anglo-American Culture, Asien, Benelux / Low Countries Studies, Lateinamerika, Karibik und Latino Studies, Nahost-, Nordafrika- und Islamstudien, Nordeuropa, Ost-, Ostmittel-, Südosteuropa, and Zentralasien. Below this list is another section titled "Fachinformationsdienste nach Fächergruppen" with the sub-heading "Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften". On the left side, there is a search bar labeled "Suche" with the text "Webis durchsuch:" and buttons for "Seite" and "Suchen". Below the search bar, there is a section for "FID" (Fachinformationsdienste) with a list of links: Fachinformationsdienste, FID-Einrichtungen, AG FID, UAG Sacherschließ., UAG Techn. Infrastr., FID-Community-Wiki, and FID-Förderprogramm. At the bottom left, there is a section for "SSG" (Sammelschwerpunkte) with links for Ehemalige SSGs and SSG System.

The shift from Specialized Research Collections (SSG) to Specialized Research Services (FID)

Susanne Göttker provides a detailed history of the library work of the German Research Foundation for the years 1949 – 2015 in her book *Literaturversorgung in Deutschland: von den Sondersammelgebieten zu den Fachinformationsdiensten: eine Analyse*. Wiesbaden: Dinges & Frick. 2016. She identified the following key differences between Specialized Research Collections (SSG) and Specialized Research Services (FID). These are concepts based on the first round of funding, as explained by Göttker, pages 114 – 116, in summary:

Specialized Research Collections (SSG)	Specialized Research Services (FID)
Scope of Collecting	
<p>The research resources relevant to the SSG are to be collected as comprehensively as possible, regardless of whether they are in conventional or digital form. Libraries collect for current research needs, but also future research needs (reservoir function). The SSG library has a lot of independence in collection decisions. An Interlibrary Loan request for material not held in Germany should lead to a purchase. The German Research Foundation funds 75% of the cost of foreign publications for the 104 specialized subject collections. This system is the reason that some SSGs, like Latin American and South Asian, have the best collections outside of the regions they curate.</p>	<p>The library service develops a strategy to address specialized needs for current research needs only. Current needs are identified by surveys, focus groups, advisory systems, definition of users for specialized materials etc.). The library will create a systematic feedback loop with the specialist, discipline specific community to identify needs. The German Research Foundation funding pays for 63 % of e-format materials. The FID focuses on services to basic current researcher need in collecting. 38 FIDs were established in five application cycles. Each FID has a search portal with enhanced discovery.</p>
Format Preference	

<p>The research resources are broadly defined (books, journals, digital online media, CD-ROMs, microforms). Digital only if the material can be used locally and loaned nationally, and if the long-term accessibility is ensured by sufficient long-term shelf life of the media or other provisions for long-term usability is a given.</p>	<p>E-preferred format for research resources: location-independent provision. There are community licenses that limit access to a specific disciplinary audience. Archiving of relevant specialist information, especially in long-term digital form is a goal.</p>
<p>Service Expectations</p>	
<p>Each SSG library must perform its sub-function within the system and exhaust all possibilities for acquiring the literature falling within its areas. This requires, in addition to the ongoing evaluation of bibliographic resources, the appropriate use of electronic search engines and harvesters.</p>	<p>Because FIDs build upon researcher community specific needs, there are differences in how libraries design FIDs. Collaboration between libraries is focused on technical aspects is desirable, but tbd: information infrastructure, search portal, issues in discovery. Engagement in the development of information services as well as exchange with other local libraries. There is a center for license issues / Kompetenzzentrum für Lizenzierung (KfL) that helps all FIDs.</p>

Refinement of the goals of the Specialized Research Services / Fachinformationsdienste FIDs

During the past 9 years, the vision for the Specialized Research Services has developed and crystalized into service expectations. The table below is a translation of an evaluation study from 2019 [Evaluierung des Förderprogramms „Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft“](#) [Susanne Heinzelmann, et al](#), see page 18; the authors of the evaluation study tried to distill what they perceived as the service philosophy of the FIDs they evaluated:

Strategic Goal of the Funding

Establishment of Powerful, Discipline-specific Information Systems (Fachinformationsdienste FIDs)

Operational Goals

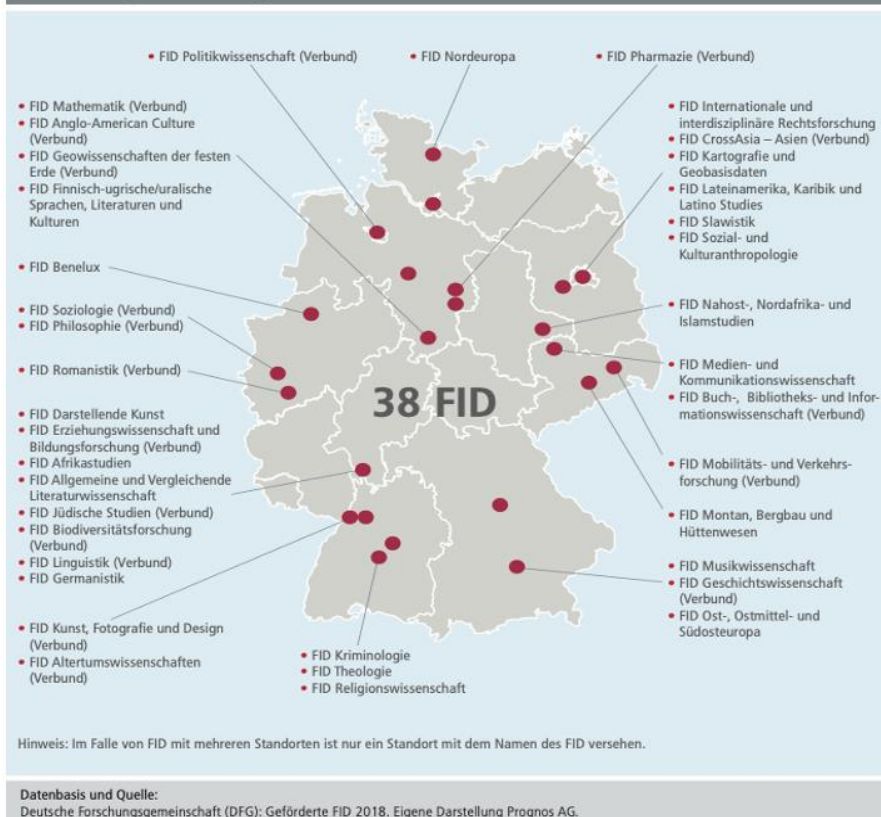
1. A Dialog with the disciplinary community of researchers to align the service with their interests and needs
2. Creation of added value compared to the existing basic service.
3. Creation of a sustainable system of information supply

Mandate (Specific Goals)

1. Systematic gathering of feedback from disciplinary community of researchers with the goal of understanding their needs
2. Developing a strategy for identifying materials for specialized needs, and making them available
3. Designing and maintaining a user-friendly catalog and research interface
4. Giving access regardless of where materials or users are located, and archiving of relevant disciplinary resources, especially digital media
5. Commitment to develop information services and collaboration and information exchange with libraries, i.e. with regard to
 - research requests
 - consulting services
 - Digitization with value-added services
 - Exhaustive Discovery of Resources

Strategic Goal of the Funding	Establishment of Powerful, Discipline-specific Information Systems (Fachinformationsdienste FIDs)		
Operational Goals	Dialog with the disciplinary community of researchers to align the service with their interests and needs	Creation of added value compared to the existing basic service.	Creation of a sustainable system of information supply
Mandate (Specific Goals)	1. Systematic gathering of feedback from disciplinary community of researchers with the goal of understanding their needs 2. Developing a strategy for identifying materials for specialized needs, and making them available 3. Designing and maintaining a user-friendly catalog and research interface 4. Giving access regardless of where materials or users are located, and archiving of relevant disciplinary resources, especially digital media		5. Commitment to develop information services and collaboration and information exchange with libraries, i.e. with regard to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research requests • consulting services • Digitization with value-added services • Exhaustive Discovery of Resources

Abbildung 5:
Übersicht der regionalen Verteilung der FID



Formerly, there were 104 Specialized Research Collections (SSG). The new system funds 38 FID Specialized Research Services (FIDs), which are distributed geographically as follows; see ["Evaluierung des Förderprogramms „Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft“"](#) Susanne Heinzelmann, et al, page 29.

Professor [Vivien Petras](#) is a member of the DFG AWBI, and analyzed the evaluation of the new research services in her article ["Die Evaluierung des Programms "Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft" der DFG - Spannungsfelder für die überregionale Informationsinfrastruktur"](#). She identifies some of the key discussion points going forward, in summary:

- How do we differentiate and define core collection versus specialized collection (Grundbedarf / Spitzenbedarf, later Spezialbedarf); what can or should be funded by the German Research Foundation?
- When FIDs negotiate licenses for specialized materials for a particular disciplinary user group, these licenses deny access to interdisciplinarity users.
- At the present, much of the long-term preservation is negotiated with the vendor through licenses; how can preservation be moved over to the FIDs?
- There is a need for more collaboration on the technical infrastructure amongst the FIDs; but this harmonization may also hinder discipline specific technical solutions.
- When the funding cycle ends, cost for IT staff falls on the library; this creates a problem with sustainability.
- How should FIDs work with local libraries? One suggestion is that they coordinate and integrate with local libraries, instead of competing for attention with local libraries. Researchers like a one-stop-shop model, not a distributed system, so researchers like to start at the local library. This creates a problem with marketing and assessment for the FIDs; how can they show usage, when use is channeled through local libraries?

APPENDIX

Suggested Readings for the German Research Foundation

The homepage of the German Research Foundation section [Scientific Library Services and Information Systems \(LIS\)](#) [Wissenschaftliche Literaturversorgungs- und Informationssysteme \(LIS\)](#) under Veröffentlichung / Publications offers the general work in libraries. The page [Förderprogramm „Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft“ / The “Specialised Information Services” Programme](#) speaks more specifically to the FIDs initiative. The following list highlights the evaluation initiatives

The German Research Foundation created an expert committee which designed the touchstones (Eckpunkte) for the evaluation of the Specialized Research Collections SSGs in 2008 (this **Eckpunkte** document was released in 2010).

- Evaluierung des von der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft geförderten Systems der Sondersammelgebiete. **Eckpunkte** der Evaluierung hervorgegangen aus der Sitzung der Expertenkommission SSG-Evaluation am 10. März 2010 in der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek in Frankfurt. Bonn. 1. Juni 2010. [PDF](#)

The evaluation of the Specialized Research Collections / [Sondersammelgebiete](#) SSGs happened in 2008, and was conducted by an outside provider. The resulting report was released to the public in 2011

- Evaluierung des DFG-geförderten Systems der Sondersammelgebiete. Michael Astor. Dr.Georg Klose. Susanne Heinzelmann. Daniel Riesenberg [PDF](#)

The follow-up to the report evaluating the system of Specialized Research Collections was issued by a German Research Foundation expert committee in 2011 (members of the Expert Committee are listed on page 12 of the document).

- Evaluierung des von der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft geförderten Systems der Sondersammelgebiete. Empfehlungen der Expertenkommission SSG-Evaluation auf Grundlage der Ergebnisse der Evaluierungsuntersuchung der Prognos AG hervorgegangen aus der Sitzung der Expertenkommission SSG-Evaluation am 9. März 2011 in der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek in Frankfurt. [PDF](#)

The German Research Foundation started published the funding opportunities for Specialized Research Services in 2012, and the first services were approved between 2013 and 2015 (See list of German Research Foundation funded projects by year). The funding for each FID was limited to two three-year terms, which meant that there was a substantial round of evaluation in 2015

- Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft. Von den Sondersammelgebieten zu den Fachinformationsdiensten: Zwischenbilanz der Umstrukturierung der

Förderung. Verabschiedet vom Ausschuss für Wissenschaftliche Bibliotheken und Informationssysteme. 2015. [PDF](#)

In 2017 German Research Foundation and its expert commission developed the evaluation criteria for the 2018 evaluation. The evaluation of the FIDs was published in 2019.

- Evaluierung des Förderprogramms „Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft“ Studie von prognos. Im Auftrag der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). Susanne Heinzemann. Dr. Jan Biela. Michelle Andersson Cordula Klaus. Patrick Frankenbach. May 2019 [PDF](#)

The German Research foundation published a commentary on the future of the Specialized Research Services.

- Stellungnahme. Weiterentwicklung des Förderprogramms „Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft“ Stellungnahme der Kommission zur Evaluierung des Förderprogramms „Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft“ May 2019. [PDF](#) The questionnaires are in the [appendix](#) of the 2019 report.

Selected Recent Secondary Literature

For an introduction in English, see CRL member Kizer Walker's article: "Re-Envisioning Distributed Collections in German Research Libraries - A View from the U.S.A." *Bibliothek. Forschung und Praxis*, 39(2015), 1: 7-12.

For the years up to 2015, there is a Zotero Library named [FID-Bibliographie](#). Susanne Göttker provides a detailed history of the library work of the German Research Foundation for the years 1949 – 2015 in her book *Literaturversorgung in Deutschland: von den Sondersammelgebieten zu den Fachinformationsdiensten: eine Analyse*. Wiesbaden: Dinges & Frick, [2016]. The German Research Foundation's [Annual Reports](#) / Jahresbericht can be found at the foundations website.

For the years 2015 to the present, there are many articles by leaders of individual FIDs. Here is a selection of articles focused on the practical aspects of building a FID. Many FID portals have blogs that are a great source of information.

"Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) Fördert Fachinformationsdienst Bauingenieurwesen, Architektur, Urbanistik: FID BAUdigital: Partner Wollen Eine Zentrale Anlaufstelle Und Ein Passgenaues Serviceangebot Für Bauingenieurwesen, Architektur Und Urbanistik Aufbauen."
2020b. *Bibliotheksdienst* 54 (5): 406-425.

"Fachinformationsdienst Erziehungswissenschaft Und Bildungsforschung Online."
2016a. *Erwachsenenbildung* 62 (4): 172.

- Fachinformationsdienst für die Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaften:
adlr.link.(2016c). *Bibliotheksdienst*, 50(7), 672-682.
- Achterberg, Inke, Roland Bertelmann, Kirsten Elger, Andreas Hübner, Norbert Pfurr, and Mechthild Schüler. 2018. "Der Fachinformationsdienst Geowissenschaften Der Festen Erde (FID GEO)." *Bibliotheksdienst* 52 (5): 391-405.
- Balke, Wolf-Tilo, Kristof Keßler, Anke Tina Krüger, Katrin Stump, Janus Wawrzinek, and Stefan Wulle. 2018. "Fachinformationsdienst Pharmazie. Zwischen Spitzenforschung Und Verlässlicher Infrastruktur." *Zeitschrift Für Bibliothekswesen Und Bibliographie* 65 (2-3): 114-117.
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- Binder, Beate. 2018. "Der Fachinformationsdienst Sozial- Und Kulturanthropologie. Kommentar Aus Nutzerinnen-Perspektive." *Zeitschrift Für Bibliothekswesen Und Bibliographie* 65 (2-3): 78-79.
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- Dimitrova, Vanya and Heike Renner-Westermann. 2018. "Das Linguistik-Portal: Übergang Von Einer Virtuellen Fachbibliothek Zu Einem Fachinformationsdienst." *Bibliotheksdienst* 52 (3): 278-289.
- Dörr, Marianne. 2014. "Vom Sondersammelgebiet Zum Fachinformationsdienst-Ein Praxisbericht." *Zeitschrift Für Bibliothekswesen Und Bibliographie* 61 (3): 130-137.

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- . 2018b. "Kontinuität Sichern, Innovation Gewährleisten. Herausforderung(En) an Den Fachinformationsdienst Sozial- Und Kulturanthropologie." *Zeitschrift Für Bibliothekswesen Und Bibliographie* 65 (2-3): 73-77.
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