
Internship at the Czech National Library of Technology

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NTK

50°6'14.083"N, 14°23'26.365"E
Národní technická knihovna
National Library of Technology



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Background

The traineeship to become academic librarian (German: Bibliotheksreferendariat) provides an intensive introduction to the procedures and operating routines of the home library. Furthermore, the program offers the unique opportunity to visit a myriad of other libraries in and outside of Germany. An internship abroad enables professional exchange with foreign colleagues and contributes to the understanding of the academic landscape of another country.

This report outlines personal experiences during a three-week internship at the Czech National Library of Technology (Národní technická knihovna, NTK) in Prague, Czech Republic from August 5 to 23, 2019.

The NTK – now and then

The history of the NTK dates back to 1718, when the engineering professor Christian Willenberg first started to collect books in his own apartment for students of the Estates School of Engineering. Over time, this first library was continuously enriched and moved several times within Prague until in 1935 it became part of the Clementinum in the Old Town. As Technical Universities Library (TUL) it was opened in the renovated east wing of the historic building complex. Renamed in 1960, the then State Library of Technology (SLT) grew larger and increasingly faced limited space at the Clementinum. Therefore, the construction of a new library was attempted and approved by the Ministry of Education in the mid-90s.

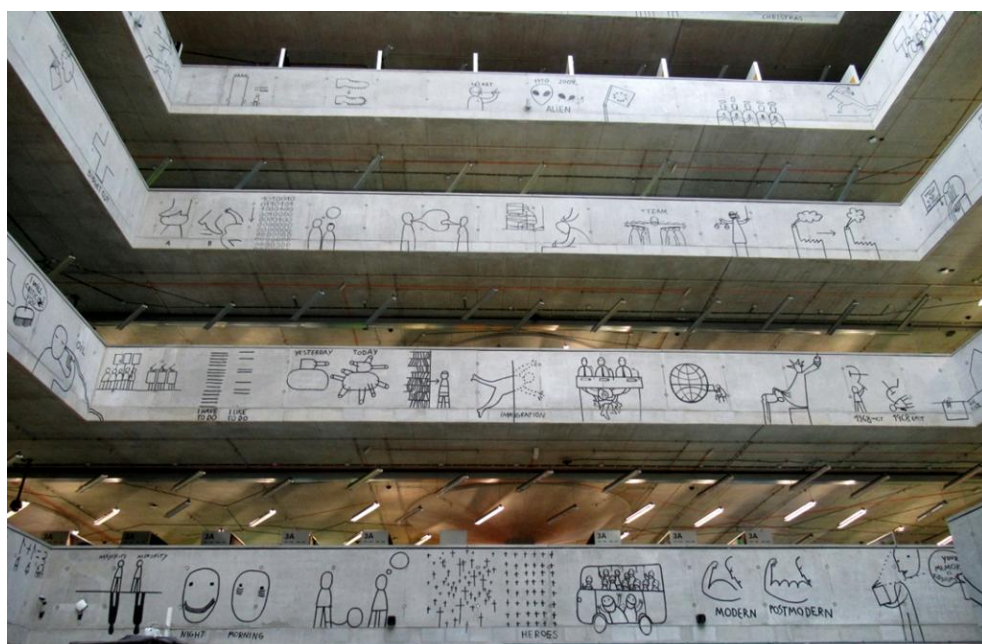
STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) institutions have a long history in Prague and today are mostly located in the Dejvice quarter within the largest municipal district Prague 6. The heart of this STEM campus was predestined as location for the new NTK and the landmark building was eventually opened in September 2009.



The Czech National Library of Technology (Národní technická knihovna, NTK) in Prague, view from south.

The building includes about 1,300 workplaces for users, a cafeteria, a gallery, and a bookstore. Moreover, it houses a branch of the Municipal Library of Prague (Městská knihovna v Praze). The NTK holds more than 1 M printed books and 515 printed journals, of which around 500,000 volumes are accessible in open stacks. The library further provides access to more than 70,000 electronic books and 50,000 electronic journal titles.

A signature feature of the library's interior design is the drawings by artist Dan Perjovschi. The mostly sociocritical cartoons refer to books and libraries, but also to the Czech Republic and its history.



Artworks inside the NTK by Dan Perjovschi.

Services of the NTK

Within the Dejvice campus, the NTK integrates the surrounding faculties of different Prague universities, such as the Czech Technical University (CTU), the University of Chemistry and Technology (UCT), and the Czech University of Life Sciences (CULS). Moreover, with the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry (IOCB) of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the NTK possesses another excellent academic cooperation partner nearby.

The collections of the UCT and IOCB are partly integrated into the shelves of the NTK, but are also located in different departments throughout the campus. The VuFind-based NTK catalog provides an integrated search over all collections and a detailed description of the location of each copy. Having a much larger collection integrated into the NTK, the library of the CTU can be searched online via a separate catalog and can be accessed in a declared area within the building of the NTK. A valuable service for chemists is provided by chemTK. This collaborative portal of the NTK, UCT, and IOCB not only allows an in-depth search within the chemistry collections of these institutions, but also facilitates user's access to important chemistry databases such as SciFinder or Reaxys.



Prague academic partners of the NTK

Besides the circulation and the provision of access to electronic resources, the NTK provides other standard library services such as interlibrary loan and document delivery services. Furthermore, team study rooms for group work or individual carrels can be reserved by the users. A large part of the NTK services emphasizes on education and research support. Many undergraduate and graduate students of Czech universities face the problem that curricula lack courses on information literacy or on scientific communication. However, these two aspects constitute fundamental knowledge for a researcher to carry out and disseminate science effectively. To improve the situation, the NTK offers consultations, courses, and workshops on topics such as literature research, citing, scientific (English) writing, or presentation skills. In order to promote a sustainable development of scientific skills in the future, already high school students and their teachers are addressed by the NTK and its services.

Images: <https://www.cvut.cz/en>; https://www.czu.cz/cache/article-data/czu/logo_culs.png;
https://www.vscht.cz/images/0!50/uzel/0000959/logoUCT_basic.png;
<https://www.uochb.cz/web/structure/31.html> (date accessed: 10.09.19)

Shaping the Czech scholarly landscape

The NTK not only represents an important institution for students and scientists of Prague, but it also plays a pioneering role within the Czech scholarly landscape. Academic research in the Czech Republic is mainly carried out by 26 public universities plus around 60 institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences, hospitals, and a few state or private research institutes. Although the country's economy is doing quite well over the last decade, budget cuts in academia were virtually not restored since the financial crisis of 2007-2008. As a result, Czech research institutions more and more struggled to pay for the ever-increasing costs of electronic information resources (EIRs). In response to this development, CzechELib was initiated on 1st of January 2017 as a national center for licensing of EIRs and installed as one of the departments of the NTK.



Already since the end of the 90s around 18 scattered consortia existed in the Czech Republic that had contracts with publishers. Based on the conditions of these consortia, a centralized purchase model for key EIRs was designed. In this model, at least three institutions have to demand a certain EIR in order to get a subsidy of 50 per cent of the costs from CzechELib. At the start of the project in 2017, negotiations with about 70 publishers for around 130 Czech research institutions were conducted by the consortium. CzechELib itself is co-funded by the European Union until the end of 2020. A further subsistence by the Czech government is targeted in the future.

Future developments at NTK

The 10 year anniversary just around the corner in September, the NTK faces a lot of changes in order to maintain its role as innovative science hub for Prague and beyond. Future plans affect the development of study spaces, an enhanced inclusion of faculty members within the Dejvice campus, and a transformation of the licensing center CzechELib towards open access.

As in most other scientific libraries, the increased use of electronic resources makes large parts of printed collections at the NTK redundant. By this, the demand for books in open stacks as well as orders of books from the closed stacks decline. In contrast to this development, there is a growth of users that look for a workplace in the library, especially during examination time. Through the removal of empty shelves and the conversion of shelf space, the NTK aims to increase the number of workplaces in the near future.

Another interesting aspect of this study space conversion at the NTK will be the inauguration of the so-called Academic Lounge in the autumn of 2019. In a dedicated area above the cafeteria, faculty members and PhD students of the surrounding campus institutions will have a chance to meet in a cozy and informal setting to discuss current scientific projects. With the Academic Lounge, the NTK wants to firmly establish itself as a central hub within the scholarly landscape of the city.

After the passing of a national open access strategy in 2016, the Czech government started a transformation process which now picks up pace. Within this process, CzechELib plays a major role when it comes to negotiations with publishers towards a transition of Czech publications to gold open access. At the current stage of the project, all expenses on open access publications from Czech institutions are monitored by CzechELib in order to build up a solid foundation for negotiations. At the end of the process, the prospect is a “Czech DEAL” with major publishers, analogous to the German arrangement with Wiley in 2018 and the ongoing negotiation with Springer Nature.

Acknowledgement

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