

"... To improve Our Knowledge of Successful Library Architecture" - Elmar Mittler and the LIBER Architecture Group Seminars

by ULRICH NIEDERER

Elmar Mittler, Director of the Staats- & Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, stepped down as chairman of the LIBER Architecture Group at the end of the recent seminar in Gent and Utrecht. It was a highly interesting and a most successful seminar - a record-setting number of 140 librarians and architects participated in the presentations and visits! A large part of this success is due to the flawless organization by Sylvia van Petegem and her team in Gent and by Bas Savenije and Tanja Notten and their team in Utrecht, and also to the preparatory planning of the Architecture Group. But the enthusiasm with which all this work was undertaken was inspired by Elmar - it is in fact the distinguishing characteristic for the preparations of all the seminars!

In order to realize the full extent of Elmar Mittler's leadership we have to look back briefly, at how the group and the seminars started. You would think that the logical way would be to begin by building a group of people who are ready to collaborate and to organize a seminar. Not Elmar - he first started with the seminars and began to slowly build a group around the repeated experience of bringing together architects and librarians, specialists from many fields and generalists around broad themes that still allowed presentations with a clear focus on the latest developments in library architecture. Look at the list below - the date of the first seminar is lost in the depths of history:

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| ? | Rome |
| 1980 | Heidelberg |
| 1982 | Leyden |
| 1985 | Stockholm |
| 1988 | Wien, Graz, Salzburg (Annexes and Underground Stacks) |
| 1990 | Bavaria |
| 1993 | Barcelona |
| 1996 | Paris (The Post-Modern Library) |
| 1998 | London (The Multifunctional Library) |
| 2000 | Warsaw (The Open Library) |
| 2002 | Leipzig (The Effective Library) |
| 2004 | Venice & Bolzano (The Renaissance of the Library) |
| 2006 | Gent & Utrecht (Changing Needs – Changing Libraries) |

The last five seminars, from 1998, were the work of the Architecture Group with several members. For the seminars in Paris and in Barcelona, Elmar worked in close association with Marie-Françoise Bisbrouck, another household name in library architecture. Before that, it was mainly his stubborn belief that one seminar realized with the help of a local organizer had to have a follow-up... And their success proved that he was right: attendance rose from some 60 participants around 1990 to 140 in 2006!

We all would like to thank Elmar for this series of seminars of more than 26 years. They have brought together many times people focused on new library buildings - librarians and architects and technicians -, they have demonstrated time and again the latest ideas in library construction and the most interesting projects. They have enabled librarians to better understand architects, and architects to see that librarians are not just bean counters... In short, they have contributed a lot to make the rare and probably daunting task to program and construct a new library much easier and much more interesting: And we count on profiting from Elmar's untiring and insatiable thirst for new ideas! Thus we hope that this conference was not his last, that we will see him at future events and that we will be able to continue to exchange ideas with him!